Soviet Literature

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October 1946

Address: "Soviet Literature", P. O. Box 527, Moscow

Soviet Literature

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
PRINTED IN THE SOVIET UNION

STALINGRAD

PART I

The order to retreat came like a bolt from the blue. Only the previous day divisional headquarters had sent a plan for defence works—a second line, road repairs, bridges and ordered me to send three sappers to rig up a divisional club. In the morning they had telephoned us to make preparations for a performance by the front line song and dance ensemble. What could be more peaceful? Igor and I had shaved specially, had our hair cut and washed, and had even washed our underwear for good measure; we were now lying on the bank of a small stream waiting for our things to dry and watching my sappers make small rafts for our scouts.

We lay there smoking, slapping the big fat horseflies on each other's backs, looking idly at my second in command as he dived under the rafts to examine their strength, alternately showing his white behind and his black heels.

Suddenly Lazarenko, the headquarters runner, appeared in the distance, steadying the rifle which was slung across his back as he raced through the fields. I marked his pace and watching him run I realized that something was in the air that had no connection with the concert. Probably another inspection from army or front headquarters . . . which meant dragging up to the front line, showing the defences, and listening to criticisms. The whole night lost. And the whole thing on the shoulders of the engineer.

Lazarenko jumped over the fence.

"Well? What's the matter?"

"Comrade Lieutenant, the chief of staff's sent for you," and his white teeth shone as he smiled and wiped the sweat from his face with his cap.

"Who? Me?"

"You and the head of the chemical service too. Said you was to be there in five minutes."

"What's the matter, do you know?"

"The devil knows," he shrugged his shoulders, wet with sweat. "If you can figure it out. . . Sent all the runners off. The captain had just gone to bed, when along comes the liaison officer."

That meant putting on our damp shorts and singlets and making for headquarters. The platoon commanders had been summoned as well.

Maximov, the chief of staff, wasn't there when we arrived. He was with the regimental commander. In the headquarters dugout there were commanders of special groups and staff officers; Sergienko of the third was the only battalion commander. Nobody knew anything. The liaison officer, lanky Lieutenant Zverev, was fussing with his saddle, grumbling and cursing, trying to tighten the girth.

"Divisional staff's loading up. That's all. . . ."

He knew nothing more.

From the north, beyond the horizon, came an intermittent rumbling, and German bombers sailed slowly in that direction.

"Making for Valuiki, the bastards," and Samusev spat viciously. "Sixty of 'em."

"They say they've plastered Valuiki already," Gogiladze remarked—he always knew everything.

"Who says so?"

"Heard it at the 852nd yesterday."

"A lot they know. . . ."

"Much or little, that's what they're saying."

Samusev sighed and turned over onto his back.

"Might have saved yourselves the trouble of making dugouts, you scouts. Just a parting gift for Jerry."

Gogiladze laughed.

"Hit the nail on the head there. As soon as you dig in, you have to move on. This is the third dugout I've built, and I never spent a night in one of 'em."

Maximov emerged from the major's dugout, and made for us, bearing himself erect as though on parade. One could always recognize him a long way off by his walk. He was evidently not in the best of tempers. Igor's tunic and pocket were unbuttoned. Gogiladze was short of one pip. How many times did he have to be told? He asked who was missing?—Two battalion commanders were not there, and the liaison chief had been called to divisional headquarters the previous day.

Maximov said no more, but seated himself on the edge of the trench, straight and stern, every button fastened as usual. He sucked at his pipe with its Mephistopheles head, without even looking at us.

With his arrival, everybody had fallen silent. Just to seem busy some were fumbling in their map cases, others in their pockets—the army instinct to be doing something when a superior officer is around.

A second group of German bombers sailed along the horizon.

The battalion commanders arrived—thickset Kappel, of the 2nd battalion, no longer young and rather like a bulldog in appearance, and Shiryayev of the 1st battalion with his cap set at a dashing angle and a gold tooth in his mouth.

Their salutes were characteristic—Kappel like a civilian's with semi-curved palm forward, Shiryayev regular army style, snapping his fingers open at his cap on the last word of his report.

Maximov rose. We did the same.

"Have you got your maps?" he rapped out in a sharp, harsh voice. His pipe had gone out, but he continued drawing on it mechanically.

"Get them out."

We took them out, and Maximov spread out his own crumpled, thumbed ordinance map, with the thick red line winding across it from east to west.

"Take down the route."

It was a long one—a hundred kilometres, ending at Novo-Belenkaya, where all were to concentrate within sixty hours.

Maximov tapped out his pipe against his heel, cleaned it with a twig and filled it again.

"Everything clear?"

There was no reply.

"It seems clear to me. We start at twenty-three hours. First lap will be thirty-six kilometres. Midday halt in Verkhnaya Duvanka. We march with guards and scouts, of course. Get marching orders from Korsakov in ten minutes, they're being made out now."

Every word was clear-cut— Maximov would have made a good radio announcer.

"The first battalion stops here. Clear? To cover the withdrawal. Remember, everything's to be taken. And no lagging behind. It's a long march. See to boots and socks. . . ."

He puffed away energetically at his pipe. His thin white fingers holding the bowl. His narrowed eyes turned to Shiryayev.

"What have you got left, battalion commander?"

Shiryayev straightened his tunic.

"Fighting men—twenty-seven. Counting drivers and the sick—forty-five in all."

"Arms?"

"Two machine guns. Three light automatics. Two 82 mm. mortars."

"How many mortar shells?"

"A hundred."

"And 'fifties?"

"Not one. And not much ammo. Two belts for each machine gun and five or six drums each for the automatics."

Shiryayev spoke calmly and slowly. I could feel that he was excited but was doing his best not to show it. It was pleasant to look at him, with his tightly drawn belt, straight shoulders, sturdy legs, and lightly closed hands held at the seams of his breeches. A triangle of singlet peeped out of the open collar of his tunic—strange that Maximov did not reprimand him for it.

"So-o-o . . ." Maximov carefully folded his map and tucked it into his case. "It's clear, then . . . Engineer Kerzhentsev will remain with you. Understand? Hold on for two days. On the eighth, when darkness falls, begin to withdraw."

"The same route?" Shiryayev asked briefly, without taking his eyes from Maximov's face.

"The same. If you don't find us there— Well, you know yourself what then. . . That's all. . . ."

Shiryayev nodded. Nobody spoke. Somebody—Kappel, I think—sighed deeply.

"I said—that's all," Maximov turned sharply towards him. "Back to your posts."

"Shall we take the men off now?" asked the short-sighted commander of the 3rd battalion, who looked like a scientist.

An angry wave of colour flooded Maximov's pale face.

"Are you at the front, or where? Want all the men to be killed? Time you learned to use your brains. . . ."

All rose, shaking off sand and grass.

"You two come in here." This was addressed to Shiryayev and myself.

The dugout was small and damp, smelling of earth. A plan of our defences was lying on the table—my work. I had spent all the morning drawing it, hurrying to get it off to headquarters. I had been given till twenty hours to finish it. Now Maximov folded the sheet neatly, tore it into four, and burned the scraps in the paraffin lamp. The paper curled, writhed and blackened.

"The Germans have reached Voronezh," he said dully, crushing the black ash under his heel. "Yesterday evening. . . ."

We said nothing.

From beneath the table Maximov pulled out a baize-covered aluminium water bottle with a screw-on drinking cup. We drank from it in turn. The home-distilled vodka was strong, it scorched our throats. We ate sour pickles with it, and then drank again.

Maximov was rubbing the bridge of his nose with his finger.

"Were you in the '41 retreat, Shiryayev?"

"Yes—right from the frontier."

"From the frontier . . . And you, Kerzhentsev?"

"I wasn't. I was in the reserve. . . ."

Maximov ate his pickle absent-mindedly.

"Things are rotten altogether. Can't avoid being ringed in." He looked Shiryayev straight in the eye. "Spare your ammunition... You'll be here for two days—don't fire more than necessary for the look of the thing. And avoid fighting. Look for us, and keep on looking—we'll be somewhere about. If not in Novo-Belenky, then somewhere near. But remember—you, too, Kerzhentsev," with a stern look at me, "not a step from here before the eighth. Clear? Not if the earth opens under you. Those were the major's orders—'Leave Shiryayev, and give him Kerzhentsev to help him.' That means something. . . Yes. What do you mean to do with your supplies?"

Shiryayev smiled.

"To hell with supplies. You take them with you. Leave three carts for ammunition. That's more than enough. . . ."

"Right, we'll take 'em."

"Do you believe in dreams, Kerzhentsev?" Maximov asked suddenly, and without awaiting any reply, he continued: "I dreamed last night that two of my front teeth had fallen out."

Shiryayev laughed. His own teeth were strong and even.

"The old women say that means somebody close to you's going to die."

"Close?" Maximov was idly tracing curly lines on a fragment of newspaper. "Are you married?"

"No," we answered, almost in a breath.

"A pity. . . I'm not married either, and now I'm sorry. A man needs a wife . . . like he needs air. Especially now. . . ."

The curly lines seemed to turn into a woman's head with long eyelashes and a heart-shaped mouth. There was a birthmark over her left eyebrow.

"Are you from Moscow, Kerzhentsev?"

"No, why?"

"Oh, nothing. . . I knew somebody, Kerzhentseva. . . Before the war. . . Zinaida Nikolayevna Kerzhentseva. Any relation of yours?"

"No, I've got nobody in Moscow."

Maximov was pacing up and down the dugout—stooping, because of the low ceiling. I felt that he wanted to tell us something, but he either felt awkward about it, or could not make up his mind.

Shiryayev glanced at his wristwatch. Maximov noticed it, and rose.

"Yes, go—not too much time left."

We rose and left the dugout, followed by Maximov. The firing had died down, and the only sound to be heard was the creaking of the frogs. We stood for some minutes listening to them. The shadow of a pine stretched almost to the dugout. Two mortar shells whistled over our heads to burst somewhere behind us. From 82 mm. mortars, evidently. Shiryayev smiled.

"Still plastering the young grove, and there's been no battery there for three days now."

We listened, but no more shells came over.

"Well, go, then," said Maximov, holding out his hand. "And look after yourselves. . . ."

We shook hands, he made a gesture as though to embrace us, but thought better of it and contented himself with gripping our hands hard.

"Save your ammo, Shiryayev—don't waste it."

"Yes, Comrade Captain."

"See you do . . ." and he walked away with his erect firm gait to the bushes, where we could just see signalmen rolling up drums of wire.

Shiryayev and I settled that I should come to him in an hour and a half, when my own affairs were settled.

2

Our regiment certainly had all the tough luck. We had been fighting only six weeks and were already short of men, we had no guns and only two or three machine guns to a battalion. . . We had only been in the line since May 20th, starting near Kharkov. We had gone straight into battle, unseasoned, only just come to the front, and we had been sent from place to place, defending first one point and then another. It was the period of the spring offensive against Kharkov. We lost ourselves, got confused, confused others, and could not get used to the bombing. In a word, we were not much use.

Then we were sent south, to the Nulatselovka district, near Kupyansk, where we stopped for two weeks, digging trenches, mining, and building blockhouses. Then the Germans attacked. They sent over countless tanks and plastered us with bombs. We lost our heads, broke, and began running round in circles. To cut it short, we were withdrawn, replaced by Guards, and sent to Kupyansk. There we constructed more escarpments and blockhouses until the Germans came up. We did not defend the town for long—only two days; then orders came to withdraw to the left bank. We blew up the railway and river bridges, and dug in among the rushes on the other side.

Here we thought we had at last come to stay. We'd never let the Germans cross the Oskol.

But they made no attempt to cross. They would fire at us from mortars, and we would reply, and that was all. In the mornings Fokke-Wolf reconnaissance planes appeared and we went for them with light machine guns but never got any of them. Flights of Junkers would roar calmly past somewhere into the rear.

My sappers made dugouts for headquarters. Village girls dug a second line along the Petropavlovka. Meanwhile, we staff officers made out reports, drew up plans and from time to time went to divisional headquarters for short courses of instruction.

In a word, life went on calmly and evenly. We even began receiving the Moscow *Pravda*. There were no casualties whatsoever.

And suddenly, like a thunderclap—came this order. . . .

At the front, you never know anything except what is going on right under your nose. If the Germans are not firing at you personally, then you feel that everything is going smoothly; if they begin a barrage, then you are sure that the whole front is on the move, from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

That was how it was now. We had dug in on the banks of the sleepy, rush-bordered Oskol and everything was calm—that meant Jerry was held up. . . That rumbling in the north—oh, let it rumble, what do you expect in wartime.

And now . . . out of a blue sky—the order to march at twenty-three hours. . . .

Without any fighting too. . . That was the worst of it . . . without any resistance. Before this we had left our homely trenches at Nulatselovka, but there we had been forced to, while here. . . Only yesterday Shiryayev and I had inspected the defences. And they were not bad, I give you my word. Even the divisional commander had praised the machine-gun emplacements and had sent engineers from the 852nd and 854th to see how we had turned the cellars of the buildings into blockhouses.

Could the Germans really have driven a wedge in so far? Voronezh. . . If Fritz had really got so far, then things didn't look so pretty for us. . . Evidently he must have, or we would not be withdrawing without a fight—and from a line like the Oskol. And there were no more rivers crossing our sector till the Don—would we really retreat as far as the Don. . . .

"Comrade Lieutenant, what shall we load on the carts?"

The platoon commander, very young and raw, with a mere hint of budding whiskers, was looking at me interrogatively.

"Shall we load the mortar shells?" he asked.

"Did division give us any lorries?"

"No."

"Then bury them. Any left on the bank?"

"About a hundred."

"Good. We'll take twenty with us in case we need them, and bury the rest."

"O.K."

"Got spades?"

"The third battalion's got thirty."

"Get after them, then, snappy."

He turned swiftly and sped to the carts, holding his satchel as he ran. He was a fine lad, tried hard, only a bit too scared of the sergeant-major.

Yes, I'd have to go to Korsakov and change my map. I had not been able to use that stiff new crackling one, with the large patch marking Kharkov in the left-hand corner. . . .

At twelve o'clock, messtins rattling softly, the last company of our regiment left, heading for Petropavlovka.

3

During the night we mined the bank. Valega, my runner, was digging holes, Sergeant Boiko was laying mines and camouflaging them, while a small, brisk little soldier like a June-beetle, a former sapper whom Shiryayev had lent me from his battalion fitted the fuses.

It was a dark night, with an occasional sprinkle of pleasant warm rain. I did not even put on my waterproof cape. Verey lights went up one after the other, while machine guns rattled lazily.

I was lying in the burdocks. A pleasant aroma rose from their wet leaves and the damp earth.

Neither Valega nor Boiko were visible. Occasionally a soldier carrying mines would pass me, rustling cautiously through the reeds. The mines lay beside me, and he took four at a time, tied together with a strap.

I looked across at the opposite bank, at a clump of willows drooping over the water, shining in the trembling light of the verey lights.

It reminded me of our street—a boulevard with mighty chestnuts which had grown over to form a sort of archway. In the spring, they would be covered with tall yellow and white candles, and in the autumn the street sweeper would burn the dead leaves, while all the children filled their pockets with chestnuts. I used to take them home, too, by the hundred, and the smooth, polished nuts would fill all boxes, get into everybody's way and roll under the cupboards and beds. There were always dozens under the big soft divan, where Granny rested after dinner. I would cover her with an old coat used only for that purpose, give her some memoirs or *Anna Karenina* and then go to look for her glasses in the drawer among the forks and spoons, or on the sideboard. By the time I found them, Granny would be asleep, and the old cat Fracass with the scorched whiskers would be purring under her very nose. . . .

Heavens, how long ago all that was. Perhaps it had never really been at all? And was just a dream? . . .

To the right was the big wardrobe, a fine place for us to play hide and seek in when we were children. It used to stand in the corridor, and was taken into the room when an extra door was made in the hallway. On top of the wardrobe were hatboxes, where the dust collected: they were always cleaned off on such occasions as New Year, May Day and mother's birthday—October 24th.

Beyond the wardrobe stood a chest of drawers with an oval mirror over it, and countless little bottles on top of it. I don't remember the time when there had been perfume in them, but for some reason they must never be thrown away. If the cork were removed, a child's nose could still catch a faint scent.

Further on there was the night table—no, the blue armchair with the leg that was bound up, and that nobody must sit on, as we always had to warn visitors. Then, after that, the night table filled with checked bedroom slippers, with Granny's powders and pills in a drawer above, which hadn't been sorted out for ages. The medicine glass for valerian drops was there, too—out of the cat's reach. . . .

That was still all there . . . where the Germans were. . . .

I had my last postcard from mother three days after hearing of the fall of Kiev. It had been sent in August, and she had written that the Germans had been driven back, the firing could hardly be heard, the circus and variety theatre were open. "And write oftener," she added, "though I know that you have not much time—but just a word . . . ."

Nine months had passed since then. Sometimes I would take that letter out of my pocket and look at the small indistinct letters and words, blurred with rain and sweat. One word, at the bottom, was even quite illegible, but it didn't matter—I knew it by heart. On the address side, to the left, was an advertisement of the Rubber Trust—a pair of legs in high Wellingtons, and the stamp on the right had a picture of the Mayakovsky underground station. I had collected stamps as a child, and asked all my friends to use new ones when they wrote to me; and now, mother had found a fine new stamp which she had posted on for me, as she had done when I was a child. . . The stamps were always kept in a tiny, long box, on the left of the table, and mother had probably turned them all over for a long time, standing by the table with her glasses off, peering at them with her shortsighted eyes, before deciding on this beauty. . . .

Was it possible that I would never see her again, small and energetic, with her gold spectacles and the tiny mole on her chin, like a black currant, that I used to kiss when I was little. . . .

Dear, beloved Kiev. . . How homesick I felt for its broad streets, its chestnuts, the yellow-roofed houses, the dark-red columns of the university. . . How I loved its slopes leading down to the Dnieper, where we would go skiing in winter, and lie on the soft grass in summer counting the stars and listening to the dreamy sirens of passing ships. . . And then we would return along the silent Kreshchatik, where the shop windows were already dark, startling the watchmen dozing in the entrances, huddled in their shaggy sheepskins even in summer.

I sometimes let my fancy stray and I wandered down Kreshchatik. I would close my eyes, draw my waterproof cape round me and walk from Bessarabka to the Dnieper. I would stop by the *Shantser*, the best cinema

in the world, or so I thought as a child. Around the screen there were white statues blowing long trumpets, and altars with crimson ribbons trembling like flames, and the familiar exciting cinema smell. How many happy hours I had spent in the *Shantser*. . . And then a little further on down the way, near the Proreznaya, cowboy films were shown in the crowded, unnumbered seats of the *Corso*—chases, shootings, mustangs, colts, women in riding breeches, bad men with thin lines of whiskers and ironical smiles. . . And in the *Express* there were dramas with Pola Negri, Asta Nilsen and Olga Chekhova. We were not so very fond of these films, but we knew the girl in the ticket office at the *Express*, so we went there every Friday. . . .

Then I would turn down Nikolayevskaya, the most European of all the Kiev streets. Neatly trimmed limes with railings round them; large, milk-white lamps hanging from chains stretched from house to house, brightly polished Lincolns by the *Continental*, and near the circus, a crowd of boys waiting for Jan Tsigan to come out, and betting on the day's fight between Danilo Pasunko and the Death Mask.

Further on, Oleg and Institute streets, the bank building with its added extra storey, and its towers at the corners, something between Gothic and Roman. The quiet, sunny Linii, cool even on the hottest July days. Cosy cottages with dusty windows. . . The century-old elms of the Palace Garden. . . Leaves rustling underfoot. . . And then—stop, the cliff. Beyond that, the Dnieper, the blue misty distances, the mighty arched sky, the thick, bristling chimneys of the Podol, the slender silhouette of the Andreyev Church clinging onto the very edge of the drop, the slapping of steamer paddles on the water and the sharp clang of the trams.

Dear, beloved Kiev. . . .

How far away it all was now. How long ago it had all been, God, what countless ages. Once there had been the Institute, and drawing-boards, and plans, and sleepless, swiftly passing nights two days before exams, and resistance of materials, and theory of architecture, and a score of other subjects I'd forgotten. . . .

Our crowd consisted of six inseparables—Anatoli Sergeyev, Rudensky, Vergun, Lucya Strizheva and merry little Shurka Grabovsky whom we called Siskin for some reason or other. We studied together, went into town together, took part in all competitions in a solid group. When we graduated the institute, we all went to the same workshop. We were just getting into our stride, had bought new tee-squares when. . . .

Siskin was killed near Kiev at Goloseyevo. Mother was working in a hospital and she wrote to tell me he had been taken there with both legs torn off. I knew nothing definite about the others. I had heard that Vergun had been cut off; Rudenko, who was shortsighted, had not been called up, and had probably been evacuated. He had seen me off when I had left. And as for Anatoli, somebody had told me that he was now a telephone operator.

But Lucya? Maybe she had managed to get away? Hardly. . . Her mother was old and feeble. I had written to her aunt in Moscow, but she knew nothing. I remembered how two years previously—June 5th, it was Lucya's birthday—I had gone on the Dnieper with her. We had taken a light skiff with a sliding seat and rowed a long way down, past Natalka and the bridge. We had our favourite spot there—a tiny, hidden beach tucked away between rushes and willows. Nobody else knew that place, and there never was anybody there. The water was smooth as a mirror, and there was a high bank which made a wonderful diving stand. . . Afterwards, tired, with blistered hands, we sat in the park and listened to Chaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. We sat somewhat to the side, and beside our bench there were some bright red flowers—the orchestra conductor had one in his buttonhole. . . .

"Shall we make a third row?" somebody asked in my ear.

I started.

Valega, my runner, was hunched up beside me, looking at me enquiringly, his tiny eyes shining in the darkness like those of a cat.

"A third row—no, we won't make a third. Go over to the fourth sector by the pier."

We dragged the rest of the mines over to the pier and began planting them. There were about forty left.

4

In the morning a Messerschmidt circled over our positions for a long time. We did not open fire, trying to spare ammunition. Two large groups of Heinkels and one of 88's sailed slowly northeast at a great height.

At eleven o'clock we began taking off the men. One by one they came, and lay down silently on the green grass of what had once been a lawn, smoking unobtrusively, arranging their things and rewinding their puttees.

Exactly at midday we fired the last rounds from there, and left. For some time the silhouette of the building could be seen through the trees, and then it disappeared.

The defences on the Oskol no longer existed. All that which only yesterday had been alive, firing, bristling with machine guns and rifles, all that which on the plans had been indicated by small red circles, zigzags and criss-crossing sectors, all that which had cost thirty days and nights, digging, constructing three or four subfloorings, and camouflaging everything with grass and branches—all that had become unnecessary. In some days more, there would only be a slimy home for frogs filled with black stinking water, it would crumble and spring would cover it with fresh, green grass. And children wading in the water would some day wander about collecting rusty cartridge cases, where the flanking and enfilading machine guns had once stood.

We passed through a pine forest. The trees were young and scanty, evidently only recently planted. We passed the headquarters dugouts. We had not finished the dugouts for the men. Freshly stripped pine boles gleamed in the darkness. The men had carried them on their shoulders from the neighbouring grove.

Petropavlovka was endlessly long and dusty. There was a church with a hole in the

belfry, and a half-rotted bridge which I should have been repairing that day according to plans. The silence was absolute, not even a dog barked. All were asleep, suspecting nothing. In the morning they would wake to see the Germans.

We marched in silence, with a queer feeling of guilt, with our eyes cast down, never looking round, bidding goodbye to no one and nothing—due east on a bearing of ninety degrees.

Beside me marched Valega, a small man from the Altai, enduring as a donkey, carrying his valise, two water bottles, a messtin, a map case, a haversack, and a gas-mask bag filled with bread. Before leaving I had wanted to throw away as much as possible, to make marching easier, but he would not even let me go near the haversack.

"No, Comrade Lieutenant, I know what you'll need better than you do. Last time you packed you forgot your toothpowder, dubbin and your shaving glass. I had to get them from the chemist's."

There was nothing left for me to say. Valega is a born dictator and it's no use arguing with him. In general he's a wonderful fellow.

He could do everything. He never asked questions, and was never idle. Wherever we might find ourselves, in five minutes he would have a tent ready, everything comfortable, with fresh grass strewn on the floor. His messtin always shone like new. He never parted with his two flasks—one for vodka, and the other for milk, and how he kept them constantly filled was a mystery known only to himself. He could shave a man, cut hair, mend boots, and light a campfire in the pouring rain. Every week I had a change of clean underwear, and my socks were mended so that you could never see where the holes had been. When we halted by a river, there was fish every day; when in the forest, he got wild strawberries, blueberries and mushrooms. And all this was done quickly and silently, without any reminding. In the five months we had been together, I had never once managed to get angry with him.

Now he was marching beside me with the silent step of a hunter. I knew that if there was a halt, he would spread out a groundsheet on the driest spot, and I would have a piece of bread and butter and some milk in a clean enamelled mug, while he would lie beside me, small, bullet-headed, looking silently at the stars and puffing at the ugly, short pipe that made him look like an old man, although he was only eighteen.

He never talked about himself. All I knew was that he had no parents, only a married sister whom he hardly knew. He had served a prison term for something, he did not say what, and been released before it was up. He had volunteered for the army—and that was all I knew of him.

We seldom spoke—he was not the talkative kind. Only once had he opened up a little. That had been three months ago, in the spring, when we were sitting alone by the campfire, drenched to the skin and chilled through. I had unwound my puttees, while he boiled concentrated millet porridge in an old tin. For the past two weeks we had been eating porridge, made of millet, and were fed up with the sight of it.

It was dark and cold; the groundsheet was swollen with water and gave no warmth. We were quite alone. As he squatted over the fire, pipe in mouth, the reflections playing on his face, he looked like a gnome concocting some magic brew.

"When the war's over," he said, "I'll go home and build myself a cottage in the forest. A log cabin. I love the forest. And you'll come to me and stay with me for three weeks. We'll go hunting and fishing. . . ."

I smiled.

"Why three weeks?"

"But what else?" He was surprised, but there was no change in his face as he puffed away at his pipe and stirred the porridge. "You can't be away any longer. You'll be working. So you'll come for three weeks. I know places where there are bears and salmon and fifteen-pound pike. We've got wonderful forests in the Altai. Nothing like these here. You'll see." He took the spoon out and licked it. "And I'll give you pelmeny,[1] I know how to make them. The real way. Our way."

And with that the conversation ended. Now I looked at him and asked:

"Well, Valega, when shall we try some of your pelmeny?"

He did not even smile.

"We haven't the right kind of meat. And besides you can't make 'em properly here."

"That means we'll have to wait till the end of the war?"

He made no reply, but went along in silence. His boots were disproportionately large, the socks stuck out of the tops, while his cap, which was too small for him, was perched on the back of his head. I knew that there were three needles stuck in that cap—with black, white and khaki thread.

At seven o'clock we made a long halt at a village called Verkhnaya Duvanka, twenty-two kilometres from Petropavlovka. That meant that we had done thirty kilometres—not bad, for the road had been a difficult one.

The men, tired with the unaccustomed march, threw off their packs and lay down in the shade of the trees. The slickest ones had brought fresh or curdled milk in their messtins, and Valega had got a loaf of white bread and honey in the comb from somewhere. I ate, and praised it—although actually I had no appetite. I simply did not want to hurt Valega.

My legs were aching, and I had rubbed a blister on my left heel. My jackboots were falling to pieces. The canvas ones had not come in time after all, the only thing to do was to wind my boots round with a bit of wire. I should have listened to Valega and worn ammunition boots for a day and had my jackboots mended. God only knew when I would get to any quartermaster's stores now. The regiment was probably far away—not less than seventy or eighty kilometres, if they had been marching the whole of those two days. But they might be occupying a defence line somewhere, or fighting their way through the Germans. The local people told us that "early in the week some soldiers came by, and yesterday evening some guns had pass-

[1] A kind of small meat dumpling, a Siberian dish.

ed." Those should be our batteries. "The rear services stopped for a day and then went on. The soldiers were all worn out, an' looking like a wet week."

But where was the front? Ahead, behind, right, left? Was there a front at all? On the map it was always shown by a thick red line, and the enemy was blue. Yesterday that blue line had been on the far side of the Oskol. But now?

The Germans would hardly have done anything before morning. They would not send their scouts out before two o'clock, after noticing that our side was quiet. At about three or four they would begin taking the infantry across. Even later, as time would be lost with assembly, orders, and so on. Five o'clock. Now it was eight, five minutes to eight. Motorcycle troops could overtake us, of course, but probably they had none. Infantry wouldn't catch us. They wouldn't get the tanks and lorries over before evening or the next morning. Everything depended on whether they had pontoons ready.

Why was there no firing? Two days previously there had been. Gunfire in the north, then it had moved to the northeast. Now there was nothing to be heard at all. Silence.

The soldiers crowded round the cauldron of thin gruel, grumbling as usual that they didn't get enough. They shook the apple trees. I rose and went over to Shiryayev, who was sitting cleaning his revolver.

"Shall we go?"

With narrowed eyes Shiryayev squinted through the barrel.

"Let the boys eat and then we'll start. Twenty minutes, no more."

"How much further to Novo-Belenkaya?"

"Sixty or seventy kilometres. There's the map, lying over there. I make it sixty-five."

"Two more marches."

"If we press on, we should be there by dinner-time tomorrow."

"We can be there all right, but shall we find anybody? I'm afraid they mightn't be the ones we want. I don't like this silence. . . ."

Freckled-faced Lieutenant Savrasov came up to us, looking worried, sat down and began to smoke.

"Two men missing."

Shiryayev laid his revolver on his puttees and turned to Savrasov.

"What do you mean?"

"Sidorenko from No.1 company and Kvast No. 2 company. They were with us yesterday evening. . . ."

"Where've they got to?"

Savrasov shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybe their feet are bad?"

"I don't think so."

"Get the company commanders here."

Shirayayev quickly assembled his revolver. The company commanders approached.

It appeared that Sidorenko and Kvast were from the same village, somewhere near Dvurechnaya. One of them had even had a visit from his wife, when we were holding the defence line. They had always been together, although they were from different companies. Nobody had noticed anything queer about them.

Shiryayev listened in silence, his lips compressed, looking somewhere to the side. Then without rising, and not looking at the company commanders, he spoke slowly, almost indifferently.

"If one more man is lost, I shall shoot you with this revolver." He slapped the holster. "Get me?"

The company commanders said nothing, but stood with their eyes on the ground. The eyelid of one was twitching.

"Those two we shan't find. They're home, looking after their own. . . Had enough of the war. . ." He cursed and rose. "Fall the men in. . . ."

His pupils had narrowed to pin-points—I had never seen him like that. He straightened his tunic with abrupt movements.

"The rats are deserting the ship. Running, the scum. . . ."

He slipped the safety catch on his revolver and put it back in the holster.

The men spread out along the road, putting on their puttees as they went, carrying messtins with milk to drink on the way. Women stood at the gates, silent, their work-roughened hands hanging by their sides. They stood at every house, watching us go by. The children watched us too. None of them ran after us. They stood and stared. On the outskirts of the village there was an old woman, who ran up to us with the short feeble steps of age. The wrinkles on her face were like a spider web. She was offering us a pot of curds. One of the men held out his messtin. "Thanks, Granny." Granny made the sign of the cross over him very quickly and scurried back as fast as she could, without looking round.

5

Quite unexpectedly, I saw Igor. He and Lazarenko, the headquarters' runner, both on horseback, appeared in front of us as though they had sprung up out of the earth. The horses were in a lather, whinneying; Igor was bareheaded, black with dust, a long gash running down his cheek.

"Water. . . ."

He drank from my flask—a long deep drink, throwing his head back, his Adam's apple moving as he gulped. The water trickled down to his collar, leaving a white runnel on his chin and neck. We did not ask any questions.

"Bandage the horse, Lazarenko. . . ."

Lazarenko led the horses away. The big roan stallion—I thought I recognized it as the commissar's—was limping. Flies were clustering round the dried blood on his near hind leg where a bullet had passed through.

Igor wiped his lips on the back of his hand and sat down by the edge of the ditch.

"A mucky business," he said abruptly. "There's no more regiment. . ." We said nothing.

"The major's killed . . . the commissar too. . . ."

Igor bit his lip. It was parched and cracked and black with dust.

"I don't know where the second battalion is now. . . Only bits and pieces of the third are left. No artillery. One 45 left, and that's got a wheel broken. . . Give me a smoke. . . Lost my cigarette case. . . ."

The three of us lit up. We had no newspaper, so we rolled ourselves cigarettes with paper from our notebooks.

"Maximov's acting regimental commander now. . . Also wounded. Left arm. Flesh wound. . . Sent me to find you and turn you back."

"Where to?"

"The devil alone knows where now. . . Got a map? Not a damn thing was left. No map, no case, no runner. Had to take Lazarenko with me. . . ."

"And what about Afonka, killed?"

"Wounded, . . Maybe he's dead by now. . . Stomach wound. . . Sent him to the dressing station, but that's gone west, too. . . ."

"The dressing station?"

"Yes, the dressing station. And the divisional telegraph company, and the supply units. . . Give me another drink. . . ."

He gulped down some more water and then rinsed out his mouth. It was only then I noticed how much weight he had lost in these two days. His cheeks had fallen in, his Gipsy eyes were burning, and locks of hair clung to his clammy brow.

"To cut a long story short, there's no more than a hundred men left in the regiment. Or rather, there were a hundred when I left. That's including everybody, storemen, cooks an' all. Your sappers are all right so far. Just one wounded, I think. . . Got a light?"

He lit his cigarette from mine, inhaled deeply and blew out a thick, dense cloud of smoke.

"In short, Maximov told me to find you and take you to him."

Shiryayev pulled out his map.

"Where is he?"

"We've lost contact with headquarters." Igor scratched his head with his cigarette holder. "Maximov had to decide for himself. Evidently we're cut off. Last we heard, headquarters was a hundred kilometres from Novo-Belenkaya. But we didn't get that far. . . ."

"And where are the Germans now?"

"The Germans? Stuffing themselves with fried eggs ten or twelve kilometres away. And guzzling schnapps. . . ."

"Are there many of them?"

"Plenty. . . We counted forty lorries. All five-ton six wheelers. If it's sixteen men to a car, that's six hundred and fifty."

"Where are they headed for?"

"They didn't tell me. There are roads going every way from there. One here, another, a kind of dirt road going south. . . ."

"And where did Maximov tell us to go?"

"Maximov?" Igor tapped the map with his finger. "To Kantemirovka. Or to Khutorki village, rather. If we don't find him there, then straight south, to Starobelsk. . . ."

We fell the men in.

We turned off the main road on to a cart track. All about us, as far as we could see, the tall corn was rippling in the breeze. The men pulled off the ears, rubbed them in their hands and chewed the ripe, golden grain. Larks were singing high up in the sky. It was too hot for tunics so we marched in our singlets.

It seems that it had all happened unexpectedly. They had reached some village and settled down to rest. Igor was with the third battalion, the second was somewhere about, five kilometres ahead. They began cooking dinner. Wounded men passing through the village told them the Germans were a long way off—forty kilometres, and they seemed to have been held up.

And suddenly tanks appeared from the village where the second battalion was quartered—ten or twelve of them. Nobody knew what they were doing. Firing broke out—confusion. Then German tommy gunners appeared from out of nowhere. The major and the commissar were killed. Three tanks were disabled. The tommy gunners were driven out of the village and our troops set up a circular defence. That was when Maximov sent Igor to find us. Just as he was leaving the village, the Germans had attacked with a score of tanks and motorized infantry—fifty lorries of them. On the way Igor came under fire, his horse was wounded and he got that long gash I had noticed on his cheek—he himself did not know how or when, he had felt nothing at the time. . . .

We crossed an anti-tank ditch, running across the field in huge zigzags, and disappearing somewhere over the horizon. The earth was still fresh, evidently recently dug. The trench was neatly constructed, according to all the rules, and carefully camouflaged with grass that was still green.

All this was being left behind—a tremendous job, of no use to anybody.

So we marched the whole day, sometimes sitting down for a short rest under the shade of the oaks, then rising to continue along the dry, grey road. The air was quivering with heat. Dust was everywhere, if you passed your hand across your forehead it came away black. Our bodies itched with sweat, and the men's tunics were soaked through. We had even lost all desire to smoke. Grasshoppers chirped incessantly.

In one of the villages the women told us that twelve lorries of Germans had passed through an hour before. And the previous evening there had been endless columns of motorcyclists. And all of them making for the forest over there. . . .

The situation was becoming grave. We would have to abandon the supplies. We dismantled the machine guns, and divided the cartridges among the men. We left part of the food behind—nothing else to be done.

It rained during the night—a persistent, sickening drizzle.

6

At dawn we came across a half-ruined roofless stone shed, the rafters poking up into the air. Evidently there had been a poultry farm here sometime—there were chicken droppings everywhere. The day began wet and overcast, we were chilled through, our boots squelched and our lips were blue. Nevertheless it was impossible to light a fire, as the shed could be seen from afar.

I had not yet had time to fall asleep under the groundsheet Valega had stretched over me when I felt someone kick me in the leg.

"Get into the trenches, engineer. . . Jerries."

From beneath the waterproof I could only see Shiryayev's boots, caked with mud, and wrinkled like concertinas.

A fine rain was falling, and through the rafters I could see the dull grey sky.

"What Jerries?"

"Look and you'll see."

Shiryayev offered me his field glasses. An extended file of men was moving parallel to our shed, about a kilometre and a half away from us. There were not so many of them—about twenty. No machine guns—probably a patrol.

Shiryayev wrapped his waterproof cape round him.

"What did they have to come this way for? Aren't there any other roads? You wait, they'll make for the shed here, see if they don't."

Igor came up to us.

"Stonewall defence? Eh? Battalion Commander?"

He too had evidently been asleep—one cheek was red and seamed. Shiryayev did not turn his head but continued gazing through his field glasses.

"All ready... Thought of that while you were dozing. The men have taken up their positions, machine guns have been set up. And so we stop here."

I took the field glasses and looked through them. The Germans were discussing something. I could not see very well, the glass was blurred by the rain and I had to keep wiping it all the time. They swung round towards us and disappeared into a gulley one after the other. Perhaps they had decided to follow its course. For a time nobody was sighted, and then figures appeared again. They were closer now, clambering out of the gulley and marching straight across the open field.

"Don't fire till I give the word," whispered Shiryayev under his breath. "I've set two machine guns in the next shed, that's a good place too."

The men were lying along the shed wall by the window and door. Somebody without a tunic, with his groundsheet thrown over his singlet had clambered up onto the rafters.

The line was making straight for us. We could now see the figures quite plainly with the naked eye. They all carried their tommy guns slung over their shoulders—they were not expecting any trouble. A tall thin man in glasses, with a revolver but no tommy gun—probably an officer—led them lurching heavily as though tired. Beside him came a small soldier with a knapsack on his back, his hands thrust through the straps, smoking a short pipe and jerking his head like a chicken pecking grain as he walked. Two Germans had lagged behind, and were stooping down, examining something.

Igor nudged me.

"Look ... you see?"

In the same spot where the group of Germans had first appeared, something was moving again—difficult to see what, through the rain.

Suddenly, in my very ear:

"Fire!"

The first man in glasses fell heavily to the ground, followed by his companion, and then several others fell. The remainder were running, falling, stumbling and rising again, bumping into one another.

"Cease fire!"

Shiryayev lowered his tommy gun, and the lock clicked. One German tried to rise, but a bullet found him. He remained motionless on all fours for a moment, and then he slowly slumped onto his side. For some minutes everything was quiet.

Shiryayev straightened his cap, which had slipped onto the back of his head.

"Let's have a smoke."

Igor searched his pocket for some tobacco.

"They'll be along again soon."

He pulled out a round, reddish tin of tobacco—the kind of tin the Germans used for butter or jam.

"Never mind, we've time for a smoke. A smoke cheers you up," and Shiryayev rolled one as thick as his finger.

"I wonder if they've any mortars. If they have...."

A mortar shell bursting a couple of paces from the shed cut off the sentence. A second exploded somewhere beyond the wall. A third—right in the shed.

The firing continued for five minutes. Shiryayev was sitting with his back against the wall. I could not see Igor. The shells were coming over in groups of five or six, with intervals of a few seconds between. Somebody beside me was groaning, on a high-pitched note, almost like a woman. Then suddenly—silence.

I raised myself and peered cautiously out of the window. The Germans were running across the field, straight towards us.

"Wait for my command...."

Shiryayev made one leap, landing by the machine gun.

Three short bursts, then a long one.

The Germans disappeared into the gulley. We brought the men out of the shed. Soon they were behind the back wall. We left two machine guns in the shed; that would be enough for the time being. We already had four men wounded and six killed.

Firing began again. Under cover of mortar fire the Germans emerged from the gulley, advanced twenty yards, but got no farther. The ground was absolutely flat, without an inch of cover. One after another they ran back to the gulley—except for those who remained, humps of green on the weed-grown clay ground.

The Germans gave up after the third attempt. Shiryayev wiped his forehead with his sleeve.

"Now they'll start surrounding us... I know their ways."

Savrasov crawled in through the window. He was deadly pale, and I could almost see his knees trembling.

"Nearly all dead in the other shed..." he said in a choking voice. "The machine gun's damaged by a splinter... I think..." His eyes travelled uncertainly from the battalion commander to me and back again.

"What do you think?" Shiryayev asked sharply.

"It's necessary... somehow... to decide...."

"Decide. Decide. I know what to decide without you telling me... How many casualties?"

"I haven't... counted... yet...."

"Not counted...."

Shiryayev rose, and went to the back of the shed. Through the broken window we could

see flat, monotonous fields without a single bush in it.

"Well. . . We'll move on. Eh? No place for us here."

He turned. His face was paler than usual.

"What's the time? My watch has stopped."

Igor looked at his watch.

"Twenty past eleven."

"All right, then . . ." Shiryayev gnawed his lip. "But we'll have to sacrifice one machine gun. To cover us."

It appeared that Filatov was the only machine gunner left. Kruglikov was killed. Sevastyanov wounded. Shiryayev's eyes took in the shed and all in it.

"And Sedykh? Where's Sedykh?"

"Up there, on the rafters."

"Get him down."

The young fellow in the singlet grasped a rafter and swung down agilely.

"Do you understand a machine gun?"

"Yes," he answered quietly, his lips barely moving. His eyes met Shiryayev's. His face was fresh and rosy, with a golden down on the cheeks, and boyish eyes—they were blue and merry, very slightly crossed, his long lashes were like a girl's. His face was like that of a mischievous boy fond of chasing pigeons and fighting the neighbour's boys, and looked out of place on the strong neck, broad shoulders, and firm, knotted biceps. He was not wearing a tunic, and the youthful muscles seemed bursting through his singlet.

"Where's your tunic?" Shiryayev restrained a smile and spoke sternly—the battalion commander.

"I was cleaning it, Comrade Commander. . . And then those . . . Jerries. . . There it is, by the machine gun." And he awkwardly scratched a callous on his rough palm.

"All right. Do you know the German ones?"

"What? Machine guns?"

"Of course, machine guns. It's machine guns we're talking about."

"Not so well . . . but I guess I can manage them all right . . ." he stammered.

"Never mind, I know them," said Igor. "One of the officers'll have to stop anyway."

He was standing, hands in pockets, swaying slightly from one foot to the other.

"I'd thought of Savrasov. Well, all right, then. . ." Shiryayev did not finish his sentence and turned to Sedykh. "D'you understand what you're to do? You remain here with the senior lieutenant. Lazarenko will stay too—they're good fighters, we can rely on them. You see yourself—there's only Filatov left. You'll cover us. D'you understand?"

"Yes," Sedykh replied quietly.

"Yes, what? . . ."

"Remain with the senior lieutenant, as a covering party."

"Get to your positions, then." Shiryayev fastened his tunic collar—it was getting quite chilly. "Take that gun, but move it away a bit. Better over there, where the Maxim is. Get your men ready, Savrasov."

Savrasov left. I could not take my eyes off the unpleasant sight of his slightly trembling knees.

"Don't stay here too long," Shiryayev told Igor. "Not more than an hour, and then follow us. Due east—to Kantemirovka."

Igor nodded silently, still swaying from one foot to the other.

"Abandon the machine gun. Take out the lock. If there are any cartridges left in the belts, take 'em along. . . ."

Five minutes later the shed was practically empty. Valega and I remained behind as well. Shiryayev had withdrawn with fourteen men including four wounded, one badly enough to be dragged along on a groundsheet.

The rain stopped. Nothing to be seen or heard of the Germans. There was an acrid smell of wet chicken droppings. Igor and I lay down behind the left hand machine gun. Valega puffed at his pipe, while Sedykh, after laying his machine gun, stood on watch at the window. Valega took some rusks and a flask of vodka from his pocket, and we drank in turn from the aluminium mug. The rain started again.

"Comrade Lieutenant, is it right that Hitler's only got one eye?" asked Sedykh turning his clear, naive gaze on me.

"I don't know, Sedykh, I think he's got both of them."

"But machine gunner Filatov said that he's only got one eye, and what's more he can't even have children. . . ."

I smiled. I could feel that Sedykh was really hoping it was all true. Lazarenko winked condescendingly.

"Them eyes of his saw that other war. And he's not a real German, he's Austrian, his name's not Hitler, but something queer, beginning wi' 'sh . . .' Isn't that right, Comrade Lieutenant?"

"Quite right. His name's Schikelgruber. He's from the Tyrol. . . ."

"The Tyrol . . ." Sedykh repeated thoughtfully, tugging at his tunic. "And do the Germans admire him?"

I told him about how and why Hitler had come to power. Sedykh listened intently, his mouth slightly open, unwinking, while Lazarenko assumed a superior air, as one to whom all this was long familiar, and Valega smoked.

"And is it true that Hitler's only a corporal? Our political officer told us so."

"Yes, that's right."

"But how's that? The big cheese and only a corporal! I thought the political officer was making it up."

He caught himself up, looked confused and began picking at his calloused hand again. I liked his bashful confusion.

"Have you been at the front long, Sedykh?"

"A long time. Since '41—September."

"And how old are you?"

He thought for a moment, and wrinkled his brow.

"Me? Nineteen, I was born in 1923."

I learned that a splinter had caught him in the shoulder near Smolensk, he had spent three months in hospital and later on had been sent southwest. He had been promoted to sergeant in our regiment.

"Well, and how do you like it at the front?"

He smiled shyly, and shrugged his shoulders.

"All right so far . . . more exciting than on the collective farm. Only it's not much fun running away all the time."

Even Valega had to smile.

"And what's there in the village? Just girls, nothing else."

"So you don't want to go back to the collective farm?"

"Why not? Of course I do. But not just yet."

"But when?"

"What's the use of going home this way? I want to go back with some officer's pips like the ones you have."

Valega rose suddenly and looked out of the window.

"What's up?"

"Jerries, I fancy... Look, over there, beyond the hill...."

To our left the Germans trying to advance around our flanks, running up, one at a time. Igor stooped over his machine gun and fired a short burst, his back and shoulders vibrating. The Germans disappeared.

"Now they'll start the mortars going," said Lazarenko under his breath and crawled away to his machine gun.

A couple of minutes later mortar shells began bursting all round the shed, but not one hit it. Again the Germans tried to cross—we could see them start, run a few paces and then they would drop suddenly and hug the ground, and then they would go back again. The machine gun raised a small ribbon of dust, and further than this ribbon the Germans could not pass. The same thing happened three or four times.

Our machine gun belts were coming to an end. We fired the last of them, and then one after the other we crawled out of the window at the back—Sedykh, Igor, Valega and myself and Lazarenko.

As I dropped from the window, a shell exploded near. I hugged the ground, and something slumped heavily onto me from behind and then crawled to one side. Lazarenko—with a stomach wound. I could see his face, suddenly chalky, and his strong white teeth clenched.

"Kaput... I think," and he tried to smile. Something red and sticky was trickling from under his shirt, which he gripped convulsively. Big beads of perspiration broke out on his brow.

"I... Comrade Lieut..." he rasped. One leg was bent up under him, he could not straighten it. He threw his head back, gasping, his hands pressed close against his stomach. His bloodless lips were trembling. He wanted to say something, but it was impossible to understand anything. Then his whole body became taut, he tried to raise himself and suddenly fell back. His lips were still, they had stopped trembling.

We took out his pocket knife, the folded cigarette papers, and the shabby wallet fastened with a rubber band. In his tunic pocket was his Communist Youth League membership card and a letter addressed in crooked, childish characters.

We laid Lazarenko in a crevice, covered him with his groundsheet and shovelled soil over him with our hands. He lay there with knees drawn up, as though asleep. Soldiers always sleep like that in their foxholes.

One by one, we ran over to a small hillock, and from that to a larger one. The Germans were still plastering the shed. For some time we could see its projecting rafters, then they disappeared.

We were sitting near a long, rough water trough by the roadside, smoking the last of our tobacco. There was only one more packet between the four of us in Valega's sack.

The wagons turned aside to the water trough, and there was much crowding, shouting and cursing. There was hardly any water left, and the horses turned away from the thick, pea-green liquid. But still the carters kept coming up and shouting, brandishing their buckets.

"Well?" said Igor, looking somewhere to the side.

"Well—what?"

"What will we do now?"

"It looks like we'll have to go on."

"Where to?"

I did not know where to myself, but I replied:

"To look for ours."

"Whom? Shiryayev? Maximov?"

"Shiryayev, Maximov, the regiment, the division, the army."

Igor said nothing to that, but whistled through his teeth. It was surprising how changed he was these days—his nose was peeling, and the once cheeky little moustache neatly trimmed was now shaggy and unkempt. He had very little in common with the photo he had once shown me—a graduate of the art school in a silk shirt, with a striped tie in a huge knot and well-cut suit, sitting carelessly on the edge of a table, cigarette in mouth, palette in hand, before a huge canvas on which dynamic figures forged ahead somewhere....

There was also another photo—a pretty girl with the faintest hint of a squint, in a white sweater. On the back had been a touching inscription in unformed writing.

All that was no more... And there was no more regiment, no more supply column, no more Shiryayev, no Maximov... There were only worn down heels, sweat-soaked tunics, rubbed white at the seams, revolvers and Germans in the very heart of Russia, a flood of them pouring along to the Don, and lines of cars, and thoughts that kept pounding heavily in one's head.

A scuffle began by the trough. Somebody had been hit and buckets began to fly. People came running from all sides... "Separate them! Separate them! What are you standing there for?" But nobody separated anybody, and the crowd grew and grew, spreading out onto the road....

... Igor would probably have been a good artist, he had a sure, firm hand. Once he had sketched Maximov and myself on a leaf from his notebook—I still had the sketch.

We had started our acquaintance with a quarrel. When the regiment was being formed in Serafimovka, I had taken his men from a gas shelter and set them to digging trenches. He had come flying, tunic unbuttoned, cap awry, full of righteous indignation. He had just been sent to the regiment as head of the chemical group, while I had been there as engineer for two weeks. I ticked him off by right of seniority, and for ten days we never spoke.

Later on, it was when we were near Kharkov, I happened to see an album of sketches

in his map case, and that was the beginning of our friendship.

A long column of cars was passing us, with small anti-tank guns bumping and jumping over the rutty road. The lorries were strong and well made, but the big white numbers painted on the doors showed they were not from our regiment. Faces that were unshaven and sunburned looked out at us from one of the lorries.

"What division, boys?"

"Which one are ye looking for?"

"Thirty-eighth."

"You're up the wrong alley. You'd better ask at the Information Bureau." Laughter.

And still the lorries passed, one after the other, one after the other, yellow, green, dark, striped. No end of them.

"Well, shall we go?"

Igor stood up and crushed his cigarette butt with his heel.

"All right, let's go."

We merged with the common flood.

8

"Hey, you birds!"

Somebody was waving to us from a passing cart. It looked like Kaluzhsky, assistant in the supply service.

"Come on, climb in."

We went closer, it was Kaluzhsky. He smelt of vodka, his tunic was unbuttoned, his smooth face with the shaved brows was red and shining.

"Hop into my car, I'll run you home. Trams stopped running," and he reached out a hand to help us up. "Want some vodka? I can give you a drop."

We refused.

"You're making a mistake—it's good vodka, and there's something to eat with it. There wasn't time to issue the extra rations. I've got butter and canned fish," he winked merrily and slapped me on my back. "And get your men up too. I've got all the stores here—five carts. . . ."

"And where are you going?" I asked.

"Fool. Who asks that now? We don't know where we're going but we're on our way. Where d'you want to go?"

"I'm serious."

"So am I. We'll get to Stalingrad somehow."

"To Stalingrad?"

"Why, doesn't that suit you? Want to go to Tashkent or Alma-Ata?"

He laughed boisterously, his gold teeth shining. He had a large, infectious laugh, and seemed bursting with health and good living. Before the war he had been manager of a shop.

"Have you seen any of our troops?" asked Igor.

"Only infantrymen, and not many of them. They say that the major and political officer are killed, and Maximov's surrounded. A pity, he had a good head on his shoulders. An engineer, after all. . . ."

"And where are your pips?" Igor interrupted him, glancing at his collar.

"Fallen off. You know how they're sewn on these days." Kaluzhsky's eyes narrowed slyly. "Put them on—and in three or four days they're not there . . . Ersatz. . . ."

"And your belt, it had a star on the buckle."

"Yes . . . it was a good belt, with a sword frog. I had to give it away. The divisional photographer wanted it. You know him—he limps and walks with a cane, I didn't like to refuse him, he wanted it badly. Maybe you'll take some vodka after all?"

We refused.

"A pity. . . It's good vodka, Moscow vodka," and he drank from the flask, eating butter afterwards, without any bread.

"Butter's the best thing to eat with it, you don't get drunk. It lines the stomach. Our doctor told me so. He's smart, too, graduated two faculties in Kharkov. I've seen his diplomas."

"And do you know where he is now?"

"No idea. Got away, probably. He's no fool—won't go poking himself into trouble." Kaluzhsky winked again.

He continued talking, every now and then drinking from the flask and licking his short greasy fingers. Sometimes he would break off the conversation to argue with neighbouring carts or with lorries that had got stuck and blocked the road, or with a driver for losing his whip or passing a trough.

In general, his point of view was that everything would be over soon. The whole front was in retreat—he knew that as a fact. He had it from a major who had it from a colonel. The Germans wanted to finish the business in September. Very sad, but it was practically a fact. We might have been able to stop them near Moscow, but now they had prepared "God knows what". . . They had the aircraft. . . And aircraft meant everything now. . . One had to look facts straight in the face. The main thing was to get across the Don. They said that Veshenskaya was already taken—a lieutenant had come back from there the day before. That left only Tsimlyanskaya, and they said that that was being bombed viciously. In any case, the carts could be abandoned, and then it would be possible to cross somewhere—higher up or lower down. And by the way—though this was quite confidential—the previous day he had got hold of three outfits of civilian clothing in a village—shirts, trousers and some kind of boots. He could let Igor and me have two of them—can't fool around with the devil, who knows what might happen. And it was necessary to take care of oneself—we could still be useful to the country. Besides, he had another plan. . . .

But he had no chance to tell us about it. Igor, who had been sitting beside me silently trimming the sole of his boot with his pocketknife, suddenly raised his head. His thin, unshaven face looked black under the sunburn and dust. His cap slipped to the back of his head.

"Do you know what I want more than anything else in all the world, at this moment, Kaluzhsky?"

"Cheese dumplings with sour cream, poured over them, eh?" laughed Kaluzhsky.

"No, not dumplings. I want to bash your face in. Like this, take a good swing and push in your self-satisfied mug. . . Understand?"

For some seconds Kaluzhsky did not know how to take this—whether to be angry or to pass it off as a joke—but he recovered him-

self at once with his usual guffaw, and slapped Igor on the knee.

"That's all nerves, nerves... Bombing tears them to shreds...."

"You can go—you know where, with your bombing and nerves...."

Igor snapped his knife to and slipped it into his pocket. "Call yourself an officer... I never know a calm minute with all this... And you... 'We can still be useful to the country'... What the devil does the country want with such scum as you? Why even the driver'd be ashamed to talk like you...."

The driver pretended not to hear. Kaluzhsky jumped down from the cart and began cursing a lorry driver—luckily for him a heavy rainfall had flooded the road.

Igor and I got out and changed over to another cart.

9

The stream of carts and lorries began to thin out; some turned off to Veshenskaya, others to Kalach, avoiding Morozovskaya, while the rest of them, the majority, went on to Tsimlyanskaya.

The steppe was bare and dead flat, with occasional hummocks, parched gulleys. The constant chirping of the grasshoppers was as nerve wracking and monotonous as the humming of telegraph wires. Hares darted about under our feet. We fired at them with tommy guns and revolvers, but missed every time. There was a smell of wormwood, dust, horse dung and urine.

We kept on, day and night, halting only to feed the horses and make dinner. There were no Germans in sight. Twice an aircraft flew overhead and dropped leaflets. Once one of our wheels broke and we spent half a day repairing it. We exchanged a blind grey mare for a bay stallion that gave us no end of trouble, kicking and snorting, refusing to pull. We exchanged him for a quiet hard-working horse with a wet drooping lip.

We were all feeling pretty downhearted and depressed. If we could only have got hold of a communiqué, to learn something about the other fronts, and find that things were going better there. If only some Germans would appear somewhere. But there were no Germans, and there might even be no war, as far as we were concerned, only a dull depression.

A liaison major whom we helped get a jeep out of a ditch informed us that there was fighting somewhere between Voroshilovgrad and Millerovo—and that word "fighting" comforted us for a little while, it meant that we hadn't given up fighting.

"But in any case, get to Stalingrad if you don't find your army. New units are being formed there. Quickest way to get back to the front..." And slamming the door shut, he disappeared in a cloud of dust.

We swore, and clambered on to those accursed carts again.

More steppe, dust, and a scorched, colourless sky.

The village women asked us where the Germans were and where we were heading for. We drank some cold milk from the ice cellars without uttering a word and waved our hands towards the east.

"There—over the Don."

I could not look at those faces, at those questioning, puzzled eyes. What could I tell them? There were lieutenant's pips on my collar, and a revolver by my side. Why wasn't I there, why was I here, rattling along on a squeaking cart and waving my head to the east in reply to questions? Where was my platoon, my regiment, my division? After all I was the commander....

What could I tell them? That it was war, that it was all a matter of the unexpected, of guile? That the Germans now had more aircraft and tanks than we had, that they were hurrying to finish the war before winter and for that reason were butting forward head first? And that even though we were forced to retreat, retreat did not mean defeat—in 1941 too, we had retreated, and then had driven the Germans back from Moscow. Yes, indeed, all that was clear, but now, now we were going eastwards, and not westwards... I had nothing to say, but waved my hand to the east and said, "Goodbye, Granny, we'll meet again, I swear we'll be back...."

And I believed it... That was all we had now, that belief....

We skirted Morozovskaya—dusty, choked with supply columns, the smoking ruins of the station chock full of box cars.

Then came the Don, small, yellow, appearing and disappearing among the wheels, radiators, trucks, naked, half-clad bodies, the dust, the hooters, the constant din of engines and voices. There were heavy clouds of dust, shell holes, swollen carcasses of horses with splintered legs, smashed trees, overturned lorries, the stench of rotting flesh, and swarms of flies....

Their faces were crimson, sweaty, devilish, their voices hoarse. A husky blonde lieutenant with engineer's badges, bareheaded, his tunic unbuttoned, was trying to organize something or other but nobody paid any attention to him and he was pushed this way and that.

In the interval between two bombings we dashed across the bridge, losing Kaluzhsky and two of the carts. A splinter scratched the calf of Sedykh's leg. In the noise and confusion somebody stole Valega's haversack. He cursed and scratched his head, and then wandered about among the shell holes and smashed carts... Just think of it—there was such a wonderful shaving set somewhere among the wreckage.

Once over the Don, we found the same dull, monotonous steppe, every day the same, today like yesterday, tomorrow like today, sunshine and dust, that was all. The sun beat down on us, stupifying us.

Then the first units appeared on their way to the front—well clothed, with tommy guns and helmets, the commanders in shiny brown belts and new map cases banging against their sides. They sized us up with a glance that held the faintest tinge of irony. Siberians.

We were held up in some village. A group going from training school to the front had not sufficient arms, they were taking them from the men going east. Two Georgian lieutenants with new infantry caps wanted our tommy guns and revolvers. At first we swore,

but then smoked some of their light flaky tobacco.

"Making for the front?"

"That's right. Yesterday training, today into battle," and both smiled.

"Well, not yet today. First we've got to find the Jerries."

"But where are they?" asked the lieutenants cautiously, God forbid that anybody should think that they were afraid.

"We thought maybe you could tell us. You read the papers."

"The papers simply say that there's fighting in the bend of the Don. That's all. Heavy fighting. They've got Voroshilovgrad."

"And Rostov?"

"Rostov, no... Nothing in the papers about it yet...."

"Nothing?"

"No."

The lieutenants were thoughtful. Then one of them asked, as though en passant:

"Well, and how's things there at the front? Running away?"

"Who's running away?" Igor acted surprised.

"Why, our troops...."

"Nobody's running... There're battles—defensive battles."

The lieutenants looked incredulously at us, with our battered appearance and shaky cart wheels.

"And you?"

"What about us?"

"You didn't run?"

"Why? We're going back to be re-formed."

The lieutenants laughed as though that were a good joke, and tipped some of their golden Caucasian tobacco into our pouches.

"Take us with you, boys," Igor said suddenly. "We've got revolvers, what more do we need?" and he slapped his holster.

The lieutenants exchanged glances.

"Honest to God, fellows... We've come far enough."

"What's the good of talking to us?" they replied dubiously. "We're small fry. Go to the chief of staff. Maybe he'll take you. Or maybe... Well, go anyway to Major Savansky. That cottage over there, where the cart with green wheels is standing."

We fastened our tunics, tightened our belts, left our revolvers behind—in case they might be taken from us.

"See that you observe all the rules when you go to him," the lieutenants called after us. "He knows them all by heart. Don't be afraid to click your heels."

The major was sitting in a tiny cottage eating borshch and sour cream from a saucepan. A pair of eyeglasses lay on the table beside him.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked without raising his head, his jaws working as he chewed a piece of meat that seemed to be tough.

Standing smartly to attention, we explained ourselves. He finished chewing his meat, laid the spoon on the table and put on his eye glasses. He gazed at us for a long time, picking his teeth with a splinter from a match box.

"What can I say to you, my friends?" he said in a deep, rolling bass. "I can't say anything to please you. D'you think you're the first? The devil you are! There's been a dozen or more like you. And what can I do with them all? You won't go as privates, and I've got two officers to a platoon as it is, and ten more in reserve. Understand?"

We were silent.

"So you see... I'd be glad enough, but..." He took up his spoon again.

"But all the same, Comrade Major...."

"What d'you mean, all the same?" His voice rose. "Are you in the army or aren't you? I've said no and that's all. I've got a regiment, not a labour exchange for the unemployed. Get me? About face. Quick march." Then in a softened tone he added: "Make your way to Stalingrad, they say headquarters are all there now. What army did you say you were from?"

"The 38th, Comrade Major."

"The 38th... 38th..." He scratched the bridge of his nose. "Somebody told me... I don't remember who it was... but somebody did tell me... Try to get to Kotelnikovo, it's on your way. Your army's there... Now go..." And again he gave his full attention to the pot of food.

We saluted and went.

In Kotelnikovo we were told that headquarters was in Abganerovo. There they sent us to Karpovka. In Karpovka a captain had heard that our army was in Kotluban. No trace of them there either. At the commandant's office we heard that a major from the 38th had been there and had gone on to Dubovka. At station Log three lieutenants from Dubovka told us that it was not there either. Everybody was going to Kletsko-Pochtovaya.

In short... we went to Stalingrad.

10

Stalingrad greeted us with the sun rising behind the rooftops throwing long, cool shadows.

The carts jogged along merrily over cobbled streets. A dirty and battered tram rattled along to meet us. There were lines of blunt-nosed Studebakers loaded with long cases—Katyusha shells. AA guns stood ready on the bare cracked ground of the squares. On the market place—mountains of tomatoes and cucumbers, and huge bottles of reddish-brown baked milk were on display. There were jackets, caps, even ties there—it was a long time since I had seen them. The girls still had their lips prettily rouged. Through a dusty shop window I could see a barber in a white smock lathering somebody's face. The cinema was showing *Anton Ivanovich Is Angry*, at 12, 2, 4, and 6. A street sweeper was shovelling up a pile of manure. From the black mouth of a loudspeaker high up on a tram standard a very sharp penetrating voice—which I could not distinguish as a man's or a woman's—was telling about nine-year-old Vanka Zhukov, writing to his grandfather in the country on Christmas Eve.[1]

Over all was the blue bowl of the sky. There was dust, and acacias, and wooden cottages with intricate carvings around the windows, and notices "Beware of the dog," and a big stone building with buxom female figures supporting something on the facade,

[1] A story by A. Chekhov.

and notices. . . "Lower Volga Cooperative Industry," "Galoshes mended," "Primus stoves mended," "Molotov District Prosecutor."

The street swung right, leading down to the bridge—with lamp posts. Under the bridge flowed an invisible stream, which bore the resounding name of Princess. A flash of the Volga with its wharves, barges, and endless rafts. We turned right again and climbed a hill. We were going to the sister of Igor's former reserve commander—"An angel, not a woman, you'll see for yourself. . . ."

We stopped at a stone bungalow with falling plaster and strips pasted across the windows. A white cat with big round eyes sitting on the step, regarded us with disapproval.

Igor disappeared into the doorway, and emerged a moment later, gay and minus cap and tunic.

"Lead the horse in here, Sedykh," he said, and whispered in my ear: "Everything's all right. Just in time for breakfast."

There was a small cosy yard, sun porch with a clothesline, something green hanging on it, and a water butt standing under a rain pipe from the roof. There was a goose tied by the leg and another cat—a black one this time—placidly washing its face with its paw.

We sat on the verandah at a table covered with a cloth, and ate an appetizing, wonderful bean soup. There were four of us, but they gave us helping after helping. Maria Kuzminichna's hands were rough and blackened from work in the kitchen, but her apron was snow-white, while the primus and the cauldron for jam-making which was hanging on the wall were both evidently cleaned every day. Maria Kuzminichna's grey hair was twisted into a knot on the back of her head, and her glasses were joined together with worsted where they rested on the bridge of her nose.

When we had finished our soup, we drank tea, and she told us that her husband, Nikolai Nikolayevich, would be home for dinner—he worked at the garage; that her brother was still in reserve, and that if we wanted a real good wash after our journey there was a shower out in the yard, only we'd have to fill the overhead tub; and that she would wash our clothes today, it would be no trouble at all.

We drank three glasses of tea each, then we went out and filled the water barrel and splashed and laughed to our hearts' content in the cramped little wooden bathhouse. It was paradise.

Nikolai Nikolayevich came home for dinner—a small baldheaded man in an alpaca coat, with a vivacious face, always tapping at the table or fiddling with something.

He took a lively interest in everything, asking us how things were at the front, how we were fed there, and what Churchill was thinking about not opening a second front—"It's a disgrace, think of it"—and did we think the Germans would get to Stalingrad and if so, had we forces to defend it. People were going out to dig trenches, he said, he himself had been twice, and some captain had told him that there were three belts of them around Stalingrad. That was fine. The captain had seemed a very sober, sensible sort of fellow, who wouldn't indulge in idle chatter.

After tea, Nikolai Nikolayevich showed us his map, with little flags marking the front. He took a metal ruler and measured the distance from Kalach and Kotelnikovo to Stalingrad, sighed and shook his head. He didn't like the look of things lately—he followed the papers carefully. He had them all neatly folded and put away in the cupboard and if Maria Kuzminichna wanted some paper to wrap up a parcel with, she had to go to a neighbour—those newspapers were sacred.

Later on, we slept in the yard under the acacias, covering ourselves with towels to keep off the flies.

In the evening we decided to go to the operetta, and began cleaning our jackboots in the yard, not sparing the spit.

A girl was sitting in the porch opposite, drinking milk from a thick glass. Maria Kuzminichna had told us that she was a doctor, and her name was Lucya. She had unusual shiny black eyes, and black eyebrows, her cropped hair was golden. She was wearing a light cotton frock, and her arms and neck golden from the sun, were bare. Igor turned round so as to be able to look at her as he worked.

"Not bad legs, eh, Yurka? And altogether. . ." He spat hard on his brush.

The girl continued sipping her milk as we cleaned our boots, then put the glass down on the step, went into the room and returned with a tin of boot polish.

"This is good polish, much better than spittle," she said, holding it out to us.

We thanked her and took it—and it certainly was better; our boots were soon shining like new. Now we need not be ashamed to show ourselves at the theatre. Why, we intended going to the theatre. Yes, to the operetta. Would she care to join us? No, she really did not like operetta, and there was no opera in Stalingrad. Is it possible? Yes, none at all. And she really was fond of opera. Yes, especially *Eugene Onegin*, *Traviata* and *Queen of Spades*. Igor was delighted. It appeared that Lucya had studied at some conservatory before going to medical college and she had a piano. The operetta was postponed indefinitely.

"Won't you come in. . . Mother'll make tea."

"With pleasure, we'd almost forgotten that sort of thing."

We sat there on a plush-covered sofa with curved legs—we were almost afraid that it might break under us, it was so delicate and fragile, and we were so awkward and clumsy. On the wall hung Beklin's *Island of the Dead*, there was a bust of Beethoven on the piano. Lucya played Liszt's *Campanella* for us.

Two thick candles slowly burned down in the sconces. The sofa was soft and comfortable, with a sloping back. I put an embroidered cushion behind my back and stretched out my legs.

The back of Lucya's neck was neatly trimmed. Her fingers raced over the keys—she must have got top marks at the music school for such skill. I listened to *Campanella*, looked at the painting and the plaster cast of Beeth-

hoven and at the line of elephants made from Ural stone in graduated sizes marching along the sideboard, but for some reason all this seemed strange to me, distant and unreal, as though veiled in mist.

How often I had dreamed of such moments at the front—no fighting, no explosions, sitting peacefully on a sofa beside a pretty girl, listening to music. And now here I was sitting on a sofa, and listening to music . . . and for some reason I felt out of place. Why? I did not know. All I knew was that from the moment when we had left the Oskol—no, later, after the shed—I had had a most unpleasant feeling. After all, I was not a deserter, nor a coward, not a hypocrite, but I felt as though I were all three.

It is not the shells or the bombs that are the worst thing in war—one can get used to all that; the worst thing is idleness, uncertainty, the absence of any definite objective. It is far worse to sit in a foxhole in an open field under a barrage than to attack. Yet the chances of death are much less. But when attacking one has an aim, an objective, while in the foxhole there's nothing to do but count the bombs—and wonder which one has your number.

Lucya rose from the piano.

"Come, let's have tea. The samovar must be boiling by now."

The table was covered with a freshly-starched white cloth, the creases of the ironed folds could still be seen. There was thick stoneless cherry jam—my favourite—served in crystal dishes. We drank tea from thin glasses, and did not know what to do with our hands, rough and scratched as they were, with the dirt grained in under the skin, poking out of frayed sleeves; we were afraid of spilling jam on the tablecloth.

Lucya's mother, an elegant lady who wore tortoise-shell glasses and a high collar, served the jam and sighed sympathetically.

"Do take some more. They don't spoil you at the front. It's hard at the front. I know, my husband was in the last war and he told me all about it," and again she sighed. "An unlucky generation, an unlucky generation. . . ."

We refused a third glass of tea, sat for another five minutes as politeness demands, and then took our leave.

"Come and see us again. We shall always be glad to see you."

We lay down in the yard under the dusty acacias, unable to sleep. Sedykh was lying beside me, he smacked his lips in his sleep and flung his arm round me. Igor was tossing about restlessly.

"You're not asleep, Yurka, are you?"

"No."

"What are you thinking of?"

"Oh . . . nothing in particular. . . ."

Igor began searching for his tobacco in the darkness.

"Got a smoke?"

"Look in my boot, the pouch is there."

Igor fumbled in my boot, pulled out the pouch and rolled himself a cigarette.

"I'm sick of all this, Yurka."

"All what?"

"All this traipsing about, going from pillar to post."

"Well—tomorrow we stop traipsing about. We'll go to headquarters—first thing, before breakfast."

"A lot of good that'll do. They'll push us off into a camp to spend our time marching and saluting. Or, worse still, to a reserve regiment."

"I'm not going to any reserve regiment."

"Not going? And not going to study either? At Alma-Ata or Frunze? They say that they're sending all the first and second lieutenants to study at special courses now."

"Well, let them. I shan't go all the same."

We lay in silence for some minutes, Igor's cigarette waxing and waning in the darkness.

"And what'll you do with the lads?"

"What lads? Valega and Sedykh?"

"They'll have to be re-assigned."

"They're not going for any re-assignment. We'll hand over the horse and cart ourselves, but we'll not give them up. I've been fighting with Valega for nine months now and we're stopping together till the end of the war, or in any case until one of us is killed."

Igor laughed.

"He's a queer fellow, that Valega of yours. Yesterday he was quarrelling with Sedykh about how to boil the potatoes. Sedykh wanted to boil them in their jackets, but Valega wasn't having any of it—his lieutenant, he said—that's you—doesn't like messing about peeling the skins off, he likes them peeled beforehand. They were arguing for about ten minutes."

"Well, what about it, it means he's a real batman," I said and turned over. "Go to sleep, we've got to be up early in the morning."

Igor yawned long and luxuriously, spat and stamped out his cigarette butt. AA guns were firing somewhere in the distance, searchlights combed the sky, Valega sighed in his sleep—he was lying a couple of paces from me curled up in a ball, his hands covering his face. He always slept that way.

My little, bullet-headed Valega, how much we had gone through together in these months, how much porridge we had eaten from the same messtin, how many nights we had spent wrapped in the same groundsheet. . . And how reluctant he had been at first to come to me as runner. For three days he had stood stubbornly, grumbling about it—"can't, not used to it." He had been ashamed to leave the other men, they had been together in the front lines, gone through everything together, and now he was to go as runner or rather as batman, a cushy job. Did they think he fought any worse than the others?

I had got very used to this big-eared little man . . . no, it was more than that, it was something very much bigger. I had never thought about it before—there had been no time.

Previously I had had friends, many of them, we had studied together, worked together, drank vodka, argued about art and other lofty matters. . . But was that sufficient? Drinking, arguing, what is generally known as common interests, a common culture?

Vadim Kastritsky was a clever, talented, subtle fellow. It was always interesting to talk to him, and he had taught me a great deal. But would he drag me off the battlefield

if I were wounded? I had never even thought about such things before, but now it was different. And I could not say whether he would or not. But Valega would—that I knew. . . Or take Sergei Velednitsky—would I go on patrol with him? I did not know. But I would go with Valega to the end of the earth. . . .

It is only at the front that one really learns to know people. I could see that clearly now. War is like litmus paper, it is like some special test. Valega read in syllables, his mathematics was poor, he could not divide correctly, and did not know how much seven times eight was; if you asked him what socialism was, or patriotism, he certainly could not explain—it was all too vague and big for him. But for me, for Igor, for his tumble-down cottage somewhere in the Urals, for Stalin whom he had never seen or heard, but saw as the symbol of everything good and right—for these he would fight to his last cartridge, tooth and nail. . . He was a real Russian. Sitting in the trenches, he would abuse the corporal more than he would the Germans, but when it came to the point he would show what he was made of . . . and as for multiplication and division, and reading fluently—he could always learn that, given time and inclination.

Valega mumbled something in his sleep, turning from side to side, and again rolled himself up in a ball, his knees doubled up under his chin. Let him sleep—soon there will be the trenches again, sleepless nights, "Valega, here—Valega, there." Let him sleep now, and when the war ends, if we're still alive, we'll think of something. . . .

11

In the evening Lucya and I walked along the river bank. The sky was red and menacing, with heavy, smoky clouds on the horizon. The lustreless, wind-rippled Volga carried rafts, rafts without end and tugs wreathed in green boughs as though for Whitsuntide. On the other side were cottages, a small church, and hand pumps in every yard.

We walked arm in arm, stopping at times to lean against the stone wall and look into the distance. Lucya was saying something about Blok and Esenin, she asked me something, and I answered something, but for some reason I felt in a strange mood, and had no desire to talk about Blok and Esenin. All this had interested and excited me once upon a time, but now it was all far, far away. Architecture, painting, literature. . . I had not read a single book since the war began, and had no desire to do so.

There would be time for all that later on.

We came out onto the central square. A disabled Heinkel stood there, grey, with its symmetrical black cross and a medieval lion on a heraldic shield. It was like some evil bird of prey that had fallen to the ground wounded and was gripping it with its claws. Boys clambered over the riddled wings, crawled into the cabin and fiddled with the instruments. Adults examined the shattered engine and jutting machine guns with grim respect from beyond a rope.

"It's all armour plated, the swine. . . ."

"Yes, they don't spare the metal."

"Try and get near that on a plywood kite!"

"How many machine guns does it carry?"

"Two. And two cannon."

"And bombs?"

"Two ton."

"Two ton?"

Lucya tugged at my sleeve.

"Come along. I'm tired of looking at it. Come onto Mamayev Kurgan."

"Where?"

"Mamayev Kurgan. You can see all Stalingrad from there, and a long, long way over the other side of the Volga. It's grand, really it is."

We went up Mamayev Kurgan.

It was solid and not at all beautiful, with its saplings planted in rows. Lucya said that a recreation ground had been planned here. Possibly it would be beautiful some day, but there was little that was attractive about it then—only some sort of water tower, shriveled grass, and sparse, prickly bushes.

But the view certainly was fine.

The city stretched out like a narrow ribbon pressed close to the river, the huge new stone buildings beautiful in the distance. They towered like white islands from a sea of wooden cottages crowding around them clinging along the sides of the gulleys, crawling down to the river, clambering upward and pushing their way in among the reinforced concrete factory buildings, which rose huge and smoky, with rumbling cranes and steamer whistles—the Red October, the Barricades, and far, far in the distance, the Tractor Plant. . . This had its own workers' settlement—white, symmetrical buildings and small cottages with shining tiled roofs.

And beyond all this the Volga—calm and smooth, broad and peaceful, with waving foliage on the other side and cottages peeping out from among it, and the purple distance, and a rocket sent up by some idiot bursting in a green and scarlet shower. . . .

We sat down on the edge of a bare, winding gulley, and watched a train snaking its way below. Its wagons with canvas-covered humps—probably tanks—stretched endlessly. The fat-funnelled engine, looked bloated with its own steam as it puffed along slowly but stubbornly.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Lucya.

"Machine guns. This would be a good place for one. . . ."

"Yura . . . how can you?"

"And another one over there—it would command all the opposite side of the gulley."

"Aren't you sick of it all?"

"All what?"

"War, machine guns. . . ."

"Of course I am—sick to death."

"Then why do you talk about it if there's no need?"

"Habit, pure and simple. I've got so now that even when I look at the moon I think how to make use of it. A dentist once told me that whenever a person was mentioned the first thing she always remembered was his teeth and fillings. . . ."

"But I, on my part, try not to think of all those amputated limbs, trepannings and other horrors, when I'm not at the hospital."

"It's because you haven't been working there long, that's all."

"Well, it's my second month."

"And it's my second year. A year of war's as good as three in peacetime—or five."

Lucya supported herself with one hand on my knee and looked into my eyes. She had a tiny mole near the left eye and long, curly lashes like Sedykh's.

"And what were you like before the war, Yura?"

"Well, how can I tell you. . . The same as now, only a little different. Liked to look at the moon, the same as everybody does, and liked chocolate, and a good seat at the theatre, and lilacs, and a drink with the boys. For that matter, I still do."

For some time we sat silently looking across the river.

"Lovely, isn't it?" said Lucya.

"Yes."

"You like to sit and look at it?"

"Yes."

"I suppose that in Kiev, too, you often sat with somebody on the bank of the Dnieper in the evening?"

"Yes."

"Have you a wife there in Kiev?"

"No, I'm not married."

"Who did you sit with, then?"

"With Lucya."

"Lucya? How strange—Lucya, too."

"Yes, she was Lucya too. And she was rather like you, with short hair. Only she didn't play the piano."

"And where is she now?"

"I don't know. She stayed back there when the Germans came. Many people had to stay behind. My parents are there too."

"Have you a picture of her?"

"Yes."

"May I see it?"

I took the picture from my wallet. Lucya and I had our photos taken together—a sufficiently bad amateur snapshot printed on daylight paper, which had practically faded away. Lucya took it and bent so low over it that her hair brushed my face. It carried a perfume of fresh, scented soap.

"Your Lucya's face isn't symmetrical. Haven't you noticed?"

"No, I hadn't."

"And do you love her? Or—are you just friends?"

"I think I do. Anyway, I miss her."

"Very much?"

"I might say—very much."

"Why—you might say?"

"Well, simply—very much."

Lucya lowered her eyes. Suddenly a wave of crimson flooded her face, even to her little ears that had been pierced for earrings.

Another train crawled past below, just as long as the first and puffing as energetically. A tram jarred and rattled along somewhere. The first pale, timid stars peeped out of the sky.

I looked at the stars, at the little flushed ear pierced for an earring, at Lucya's slender hand and the ring with a green stone on her little finger. She was a charming girl, and it was very pleasant to be with her. But in a few days' time we would part and never meet again. And I would meet other Lucyas as the war went on, and perhaps sit with them too and then they would disappear into nowhere, and I would forget their faces and names, and they would all merge into one great, vague illusion of something that was past, distant and alluring.

I gave her the address of a Moscow friend, in case she might care to write after the war. She jotted it down carefully in a tiny address book and said that she would most certainly write.

. . . An hour later we rose and went back. Lucya was silent, holding my arm with both her hands, while I could feel her heart thumping, and her soft, warm hands, and her whole pleasant and winning personality.

12

Work was assigned us—Igor, myself, and two other reserve lieutenants. We were designated a special service group. Our chief, Major Goldstab, was terribly intellectual, bald and shortsighted. The head of the group was Captain Samoilenko—also from the reserve—a gloomy man who had the peculiar habit of pulling his nose.

The work was not complicated—making all preparations for blowing up industrial objectives in the city if necessary. We had to draw up a plan for disposing the explosives, reckon how much would be necessary, decide on the means of touching them off, and instruct special groups of people in the factories. That was all.

I drew a plan of the meat packing plant, the cold storage plant, the mill and the bread factory. Igor—the brewery, another mill and the Metiz factory.

We moved over into new quarters—a large, empty, comfortless room with a balcony over Station Square. There was practically no furniture—a table, four chairs, three broken beds and an electric stove that somebody had forgotten.

Igor and I took possession of two of the beds by laying our greatcoats over them. A senior lieutenant with the strange name of Pengaunis—who must have been a Lett—took the third. The fourth of our company, Shapiro, fixed himself up on the chairs. Valega and Sedykh slept on the floor in the neighbouring room. The gloomy captain was in some private apartment somewhere. He came once a day, pulled his nose, asked what we had done, smoked a cigarette with us and went away again.

At the factories the directors worried, threw up their hands, said there was nobody to form factory detachments—only women left. The workers eyed us—what was this army group? We pretended to be examining the fire extinguishers.

At the cold storage plant we were treated to large plates of ice cream. At the meat packing plant—sausages of various kinds were offered.

The days were clear and hot, the nights stuffy.

Maria Kuzminichna complained that prices had gone up on the market, and it was quite impossible to buy milk and butter. Nikolai Nikolayevich sighed over his maps. The

communiqués brought little comfort—Maikop and Krasnodar were taken.

There were large numbers of wounded in the town—more of them with every day. They moved in long files towards the Volga, unshaven, bandages gleaming against their dusty, bloodstained uniforms. The hospitals were being evacuated. Patrols ranged the town, going into the houses and checking identification papers. The roads from Kalach and Kotelnikovo were jammed with motor traffic of all kinds. In all the yards people were busy digging slit trenches and large, deep pits—to be filled with water for use in case of fire. Occasionally a Jerry would fly overhead, drop two or three bombs somewhere and then fly off again—the town had plenty of AA guns.

Churchill flew to Moscow. The communiqué was extremely vague.

We had no exact idea as to where fighting was going on. The communiqués said: "Northeast of Kotelnikovo," "The Don Elbow". . . Talk ran that Abganerovo was already in German hands—only sixty-five kilometres away. Maria Kuzminichna heard at the market—the general rumour exchange—that our forces had withdrawn from Kalach to Karpovka. The wounded came mainly from Kalach; they threw up their hands—"Tanks . . . aviation . . . what can you do?"

At the Red Army club, *Izvestia* and *Stalingradskaya Pravda* were posted regularly on the notice board.

In the town library, with its balcony directly over the Volga a pleasant old lady with her hair done in the style of the eighties, handed out Balzac and asked one not to dog-ear the leaves.

Boys shot stones at crows from catapults, and played at "Russians and Fritzes." Girls played in the classrooms, hopping on one foot.

So August dragged by—dusty, stifling, cloudless.

13

On Sunday I awakened unusually early. Fleas had appeared from somewhere, and kept me awake. Igor and the other two were still asleep.

I rose and went into the kitchen. Sedykh was preparing pancakes on the primus stove while Valega fussed about with the loudspeaker—he had long been dreaming of listening to the broadcasts. Through the window we could see the wall of the house opposite, blinding white in the sunshine, and a patch of pale sky looking as though it had faded in the heat.

I decided not to go to the factory—the plan was ready, the amount of explosive calculated, and the dynamite groups were postponed from day to day because there were none as yet.

I pulled Igor's greatcoat from him.

"Get up; come for a swim in the Volga."

There was no beach at Stalingrad. We dived right off the rafts into the warm oily water, gleaming with spilt petrol. Afterwards we lay on the boards, and watched the Volga, screwing up our eyes against the blinding glare. It was not like the Dnieper, not a bit like it. The last time I had seen the Dnieper was a few days before the war. It was cheerful and almost frivolous—its huge beaches strewn with naked tanned bodies, parasols and kiosks, its attractive swimming pools, and its boats without end—canoes, sloops, fast rowboats, slender racing skiffs, punts and snow-white yachts. Everywhere there had been movement, life, a flitting play of colour under the midday sun.

Here it was different. Here things were more serious and businesslike. There were rafts and barges, smoky, fussy motorboats, and tugs with their sirens blaring and their cables slapping the water. Before the war there had probably been yachts and sloops here too, but I had not seen them before the war. And now this broad, shining exapnse of water with its rafts, and the cranes and long dull sheds along the shores, was like a shop in some strange factory.

All the same, it was the Volga, and one could lie for hours watching the rafts floating away down the river, the oil playing colourfully on the surface, and the paddleboats threshing their way up. I lay and watched it all, while Igor was talking about being sick of having nothing to do, sick of the factory directors and all this red tape.

I listened to him with half an ear, watching a puffing motorboat draw up to the opposite bank, and trying not to think that in a couple of weeks this might be the front, and here, where we were lying, there would be Germans, and we would be on that opposite bank with its wavy greenery, and bombs would be sending up white fountains of water, and swollen bodies would be floating on that gleaming water, down, down somewhere, to Astrakhan, to the Caspian.

Igor vigorously slapped me on the back.

"Come, let's go in the water. . . Look, there's a steamer over there."

With a short run, he took off from the edge of the slippery boards and dived into the water. For a few seconds he vanished, then reappeared, puffing and blowing, a distance from the bank. With powerful strokes he crawled towards the steamer, his shoulders almost out of the water, his mouth appearing sometimes for a second beneath his lifted arm to take a breath. He swam well—Lucya could crawl, too—not so strongly, but well enough. I could not quite get the hang of it—something wrong with my breathing, and my legs got tired. I knew that they ought to be working all the time, quickly and evenly, like scissors.

The steamer approached—a squat vessel, with a long funnel and a trail of barges. Igor returned, panting.

"Heart's giving up. Getting old. And this isn't a river, anyway, more like an oil tank." He was shining all over from the oil. "Come on, let's go to the library."

I had no objections. My back was sore from lying on the hard boards.

In the library, Igor enjoyed himself with the *Apollo*[1] for 1911, while I chose some Peruvian novel. The cane chairs were comfortable, the room was quiet and cosy with its portraits of Turgenev, Tyutchev, and somebody else with whiskers and a tie. The large clock on the wall slowly chimed every

[1] A pre-revolutionary art magazine.

quarter of an hour. Two small boys were doubled up with laughter over Doré's illustrations to Baron Münchausen. I had once had that same book—it had had a crimson and gold cover, and I could have looked it through twenty times a day. I had particularly liked the place where he pulls himself out of the bog by his own pigtail, and that other picture—the horse cut in two by the gate, standing calmly drinking at the fountain, with the water gushing out behind.

We sat on until the librarian hinted that the place closed at six, as they had only one shift now. Previously it had been open till ten, but now her assistant was ill, and they only worked from twelve to six.

"Come again tomorrow. We're always open from twelve to six. And there are more *Apollos*—for 1912 and 1917."

We said good-day and left. Valega would surely grumble—everything would be cold.

By the station a square black loudspeaker hoarsely proclaimed an air alert. They had been coming three or four times a day, but nobody paid the slightest attention to them. There would be some firing with never a sight of an airplane, and then the "all clear" would sound.

Valega met us, looking glum.

"You know that we haven't any oven. I've heated it twice already. The potatoes are quite soggy now and the borshch. . ." He made a hopeless gesture, and unwrapped a greatcoat from round the borshch. AA guns began banging from somewhere beyond the station.

The borshch was indeed excellent—made from a meat bouillon, and with sour cream added to it. And even plates had appeared from somewhere—pretty ones with pink flowers.

"We might be in a restaurant," Igor laughed. "All we need is a carpet and napkins folded in triangles in the glasses."

And suddenly—everything flies into the air—the plates, spoons, glass, the loudspeaker hanging on the wall. . . .

What the devil! . . .

From beyond the station aircraft appeared—slowly, as though on parade. Never before had I seen such a number—they were so many that it was even difficult to determine where they came from. The whole sky was filled with bursting shells.

We stood out on the balcony staring up at the sky—Igor, Valega, Sedykh and myself. We could not tear ourselves away.

The Germans were flying directly towards us in a wedge, like wild ducks. They were flying low—we could see the yellow wingtips with their white crosses, and the chassis like unsheathed claws. Ten . . . twelve . . . fifteen . . . eighteen. . . They re-formed into a chain. . . Just opposite us. . . The leading one somersaulted sideways, wheels up, and went into a dive. . . I could not tear my eyes away from it. The wheels and the nose were red. Its siren began to howl, and black points detached themselves from under the wings. One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . ten . . . twelve . . . the last one large and white. I shut my eyes and gripped the balustrade—instinct. There was no earth to dig into, but I had to do something. . . I could hear the "singer", coming out of the dive, and then everything merged into one indistinguishable roaring and thundering.

Everything was trembling with a horrible vibration. I opened my eyes for a second, but could see nothing. Everything was covered in a dense heavy pall of dust or smoke. . . Again the bombs whistled and crashed, and again I gripped the balustrade. Somebody clutched my arm above the elbow—it was like pincers. Valega's face for a second, as though seen in a flash of lightning—white, with round eyes and open mouth . . . and then it disappeared again.

How long did it continue? One hour, two, or just fifteen minutes? There was neither time nor space, only murk and the cold, rough balustrade. Nothing more. . . .

The balustrade had disappeared. I was lying on something soft, warm and uncomfortable. It moved beneath me. I clutched at it. It crawled.

I had no thoughts, my brain seemed switched off. There was only instinct left—an animal hunger for life, and tense anticipation. Or rather not even anticipation, only a feeling of—quick, quick, anything, but quick. . . .

Later on we sat on the beds and smoked—I don't even remember how we got there. The dust around was as thick as fog. There was a smell of pitch. Dust was everywhere—in our teeth, our ears, under our collars. On the floor were fragments of broken plates and pools of borshch, cabbage leaves and a piece of meat. There was a chunk of asphalt in the middle of the room. Every window was smashed. My throat hurt as though it had been bashed about with a stick.

We sat there smoking. I could see Valega's fingers trembling, and knew that mine were probably doing the same. Sedykh was rubbing his leg. Igor had a large black and blue mark on his temple, but he was attempting to smile.

We went out onto the balcony. The station was on fire, and so was a house near it—some editorial office, I believe. To the left towards the elevator, was one crimson glow. The square was deserted now, there were several pits with asphalt curled back at the edges. Somebody was lying near the fountain. An abandoned cart, shafts tilted upwards, seemed to be sitting on its hind legs. A fallen horse was lying there, kicking—it had been struck in the belly, and crimson ribbons of intestines were trailing on the asphalt. The smoke became thicker, blacker, and drifted over the square in one solid mass.

"Will you have something to eat?" asked Valega. His voice was soft and breaking.

I did not know whether I wanted to eat or not, but I said I would. We ate the cold potatoes straight from the frying pan. Igor sat opposite me, his face grey with dust, looking like a statue. The bruise had now spread in an angry purple over his whole forehead.

"Oh, the devil with it," and he waved his hand. "I can't get the stuff down. . ." And he went out onto the balcony.

The streets were filled with carts and people dragging bundles, stumbling as they ran. Things fell off the carts, people stopped, stacked them up again in silence, their eyes

distended. Bitter smoke seeped out of the windows, catching one's throat. Glass crunched underfoot, and bricks, bits of concrete, tables, and overturned cupboards were lying about. Somebody was carried past on a blanket. An old woman in a check shawl was dragging a stool and a huge bundle after her. "Lord God in Heaven. . . Holy Mother. . ." The bundle slipped, the shawl fell from her head and fell on the ground.

At the corner of Gogolevskaya there was a huge bomb crater—big enough to hold a house. Soldiers were clearing away the pieces of asphalt that lay strewn over the ground. The air vibrated with the piercing howl of the sirens on the fire appliances.

We are going home.

People are running, running, running. . . .

The smoke spread over the whole town, hiding the sky, making my eyes water and my throat smart, while long yellow tongues of fire leaped from the windows, licking the walls of the corner house, firemen uncoiled their hoses.

. . . We tried to sleep, tossing from side to side, but the beds seemed hard, and sleep was impossible. The loudspeaker was silent. All night the fires raged.

14

The captain appeared at dawn, tugged at his nose and told us that a lorry would come in five minutes—we were to go to the Tractor Works.

"The Tractor Works? Why?"

"Don't know. Orders."

"Whose?"

"Goldstab. He's going there too."

"What are we to do there?"

"I tell you I don't know."

I rolled up the blueprints and stuffed them in my haversack. Shapiro listened.

"They're coming again. . . ."

Silence. Valega standing with a tin in one hand, an opener in the other. A low, distant, familiar sound of engines—swarms of them.

"Have to go to the cellar." The captain pulled at his nose, moved towards the door, and collided with a man in a leather jacket, red-faced and perspiring.

"You're Samoilenko?" in a hoarse, breaking voice.

"Yes."

"Where are your men? I've come with the lorry. . . Get a move on. . . You can hear them already."

Valega looked at me enquiringly, still holding the tin and the opener.

"To the lorry. You heard?"

As we clambered into the lorry the first bombs fell somewhere behind us, in the railway settlement. Aircraft were flying over our heads, swinging slowly to the right.

I took off my cap so that the wind should not carry it away, and we drove out of the town. We could see the aircraft diving low over the station, the centre of the city, and the wharves. A dense haze of dust hung over the town, and a thick, mushroom-shaped column of black smoke rose from somewhere near the river—that must be the oil tanks burning.

The road was crowded with people—endless streams of them, turning back to look at the town—some half naked, some in greatcoats, smoke-stained.

Goldstab was sitting in a cellar so packed with people, cases, bundles and greatcoats that we could hardly make our way through. Somebody was shouting hoarsely into the telephone. Goldstab—pale, unshaven—peered at us, without recognizing us.

"Who are you looking for?"

"You. We're the sappers."

"Aha . . . sappers. Fine. Throw down your coats on that box. Come on the lorry? Good. . . Come here."

He spoke jerkily, hurriedly, rubbing his small dry hands covered with black hair.

"Time's short. The Germans are on the other side of the gulley—" he searched for something in his pocket, did not find it, and waved his hand—"five hundred metres away, not more. Mortaring the Tractor Works. Paratroops. Not very many, it seems. None of our regulars here, the workers are holding them." He glanced at his small, elegant gold wristwatch.

"It's 6:15 now. By 8:00 the works must be ready to be blown up. Got it? There's sappers there—an army battalion, but very few of them. There's cartridges, wire, capsules. They need help. Find Lieutenant Bolshov—he's there—in a blue greatcoat and cap. He'll tell you everything. I'll be there at 8:00."

He thought for a moment, biting his lip.

"Very well, then. . . ."

He took a tiny notebook and pencil from his pocket and wrote something down in it.

"Kerzhentsev—the power station, Svidersky—the foundry, Samoilenko—the assembling shop, and so on," he put the notebook back in his pocket and fastened the button. "Don't lose time. You can leave your stuff here."

At the entrance to the Tractor Plant foundry, a group of workers had surrounded a huge fellow with a bandaged arm and sleeve hanging in tatters.

"The swine have got to the institute. . . Tommy guns, and we with rifles. . . As soon as we come to the entrance—tr-r-r- with their tommy guns. . . God, a tank came up, and its gun spat right into the house. That sent them scampering like beetles. Now they're on the other side of Mechetka. . . ."

His eyes were blazing. He was excited at having people listening to him, at having been wounded, having fired at the Germans, and he did not want to stop talking.

"The tank gun only fired once—into the first floor, then the stones flew and so did Jerry—out of the back door—slinking from tree to tree. . . ."

"Many of them?" asked a voice from the crowd.

"For you and me, plenty. A couple of divisions or more."

"Why, did you count 'em?"

"Count 'em, hell. . ." He spat out scornfully, supporting his right arm with his left. "You try it. . . Go down there and do some arithmetic. . ." He waved his good arm. "Where's the dressing station, boys? Can't stop talking to you all day. . . ."

On the way back we met an old man with

a head wound, and a boy with an arm wound. The Germans were still on the other side of the gulley, he said, sending over mortar shells. They weren't attacking, neither were ours. It was bad that there were no real officers—he had heard that the next day an infantry unit with artillery would arrive. Twice German tanks had rolled up to the gulley, fired a few shots and retreated. Ours were not firing much—evidently short of ammunition. But in general it was not so bad. The tractor men could hold their plant. And with a wink, the old man and the boy went to look for the dressing station. A board with a red cross hastily nailed to a post pointed towards the river—it had not been there when we came.

At eight o'clock Goldstab arrived and asked how things were. The sacks of explosives would have to be dragged from the machine shop to the cellar and placed beneath each generator—it would be safer there and not worry the workers. Then one of us must be permanently on duty by the telephone, and in general, have everything ready by night. Goldstab took Lvovich and myself aside. Rubbed his hands. "The first signal—'What time is it?' That means—be ready. The second, to act—'Send list No. 3.' Clear? Not a step from the telephone."

"I understand."

"Remember there won't be more than half an hour after the warning, you've got to have everything finally prepared by then. You and Lvovich are responsible for getting the workers away. Kerzhentsev for the explosion."

"Very well. And in what order?"

"No special order. Both signals come to all shops simultaneously, so the explosions will be simultaneous. Afterwards, get to the wharf—you know it, Lvovich—there'll be a motor boat. Is everything clear?"

"Yes, everything."

Goldstab left. A rocket soared up from somewhere quite near, beyond the foundry, tommy guns rattled, and there was an occasional machine-gun burst.

Beside the door an electric switch was fastened to the wall—small, nothing unusual, quite ordinary looking, with a black handle, such as one sees on a meter in apartments. I examined it. Two wires stretched away from it—one to the accumulators—eight buried cases, the other to the explosives—eighty fifty-kilogram sacks with ammonite. One of the wires dangled, and the handle of the switch was fastened back with string for extra safety. But in an hour or two, perhaps earlier, I would hear the telephone ring, I would join up the wire, unfasten the string, test the connections once more and then with two fingers carefully connect the switch . . . and then. . . There would be no generators, no cisterns, no machine shop with its white-tiled walls . . . nothing. . . .

We sat and smoked, while Valega darned a hole on the knee of his trousers. Sedykh and the sergeant were at the power station. The telephone gleamed in the corner. Igor lay on a pallet staring at the ceiling.

At twelve Goldstab telephoned—check the connections and don't go to sleep.

At five there was another ring. We could go to sleep. Goldstab speaking.

Thank heaven. . . .

We lay down on the bare pallets, shifting our revolvers to the front. A pity I had left my greatcoat at Goldstab's.

15

It was just the same on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Firing, shell bursts, duty at the telephone, and at five—sleep.

The atmosphere became less tense.

Days passed one after the other, clear and sunny, with drifting spiderwebs.

No orders.

There was evidently nothing left of the town, the Germans were bombing it from morning to night. The oil reservoir was on fire. A heavy pall of dust and smoke hung there, veiling the sun so that one could look directly at it. There was fighting by the elevator in the southern part of the town, and by Mamayev Kurgan in the north.

There was no change by our gulley. One night two divisions came past—battalion after battalion, the whole night through, with artillery and supply column. Twice the Germans tried to break through the gulley at night and then tommy guns rattled and Goldstab telephoned: "Be ready," and in the morning it all died down and we could sleep.

We began to make ourselves at home in our shelter; fixed up an electric extension and made dinner on stoves, and covered the walls with excellent cartridge paper from the factory drawing office. Valega and Sedykh had pinned up a portrait of Stalin and two picture postcards in their corner, and somewhere or other Sedykh had found a geography textbook, Chekhov's *Letters* and *Niva* for 1912. In the evening he would read, wetting his finger to turn the pages, frowning and moving his lips, sometimes asking the meaning of words, and why Prince Alexei had so many Orders when he was only seven years old. I liked Sedykh, his snub-nosed, childlike face, with the slightly squinting laughing eyes, youth radiating from him, even his comical habit of scratching his palm when he felt embarrassed. He did everything with such zest that it was infectious. When one saw him washing, spluttering, splashing, slapping himself on the back and chest, one wanted to do the same. If I told him to bring in wood, he would drag along a whole cubic metre. His youthful muscles were aching for work. He unscrewed nuts and bolts with his fingers. He and Igor wrestled, and for two days Igor could not turn his head—and Igor was an experienced wrestler, who knew all the grips.

His thirst for knowledge was delightfully amusing. He would sit hugging his knees, mouth open, like a child listening to a story. His questions were unexpected and naive. Why couldn't the Germans find out how Katyushas were made? Why was there always rain at the new moon? Why did a compass needle always point north? And was it true that Roosevelt couldn't use his legs?

One evening the talk turned upon heroes and decorations. Sedykh listened, absorbed, hugging his knees.

"What d'ye have to do to get the Order of Lenin?" he asked.

We all laughed. . . .

"Well, not the Order of Lenin, something less, maybe. . . ."

I explained it all, and he listened silently, staring into the corner, a cigarette stuck to his lip.

"Then that's all right," he said quietly.

"What's all right?"

"I shall have an Order."

He spoke simply, with assurance, as though of something already accomplished. I looked at his broad back contrasting so strangely with the golden down on his cheeks, remembered how carefully he always wiped his tommy gun with a cloth before a German attack—and I believed him.

Valega was jealous of him—that was plain.

"Senior Lieutenant Svidersky has no batman—go to him," he said glumly, taking away the mug from which he was pouring water for me.

Sedykh brought an armful of straw from somewhere. Valega felt it and frowned. "The lieutenant won't sleep on that rubbish," and brought another in no way different.

But in general they got on well; when they made dinner together, Valega would grumble and criticize the half-cooked porridge, while Sedykh laughed gaily and teased Valega, whom for some reason he had dubbed Schnapps.

In the evening Valega and Sedykh would make blank cartridges—we had five cases of TNT in reserve—and in the morning they would go and stun fish, and bring in flapping sturgeons and sterlet in a bucket. Sometimes Bolshov would visit us, and then we would lay down a thick *Niva* and play cards. Georgi Akimovich, the power station official could not stand that, he would seize Chekhov's *Letters* and go demonstratively to his own corner—a door laid across two pallets.

I was beginning to like him, in spite of his cantankerous ways and continual disgruntlement. He was always working, always testing the wires himself—and they were broken three or four times a day. He would grumble, curse, seethe, accuse us all of doing nothing, but he knew every bolt and screw of his power station. He was a combination of extreme pessimism and amazing energy.

"How can we fight the Germans," he said, nervously tugging at his tie and frowning. "They've driven on automobiles all the way from Berlin to Stalingrad, and here we are lying in jackets and overalls in trenches, with '91 model rifles."

Igor flared up.

"What do you want to say by that?"

"That we don't know how to fight."

"And what is knowing how to fight?"

"What? Going from Berlin to the Volga—that's knowing how."

"You have to know how to retreat from the border to the Volga, too."

Georgi Akimovich laughed dryly. Igor began to lose his temper.

"What do you find so funny about that? France actually fell in a fortnight—collapsed like a pack of cards. And we're fighting the second year, alone."

"Why compare us with France? Forty million and two hundred million. Six hundred kilometres and two thousand kilometres. And who was at the head of things there? Petains, Lavals—the ones that are working peacefully with the Germans now."

"That's just it," Igor flashed back. "Petains and Lavals. . . Just that. . . And we haven't any of that sort. Finished with them. Don't you understand that that's the main thing, our people are a different sort. . . And that's why we're fighting . . . still. . . Even here on the Volga, after losing the Ukraine and Belorussia. . . What country, what country, I say, what other people could have stood up against all that?"

Georgi Akimovich smiled crookedly.

"None."

"Aha! None? You admit it? . . ."

"I admit it. But does that make it any easier to know that there are other countries less able to resist than we? That's just consoling yourself. . . We don't need that. We've got to look facts soberly in the face. You can't do anything with heroism alone. . . Heroism's heroism, but tanks are tanks. . . ."

"Our tanks are no worse than the Germans'—they're better in fact, a tankman told me. . . ."

"I'm not disputing it, they may be better—I'm no judge. . . But one good tank won't destroy ten average ones. . . What do you think?"

"Wait a bit. . . We're going to have plenty of tanks. . . ."

"When? When we reach the Urals. . . ."

Igor jumped up as though he had been stung.

"Who's going to the Urals? You? Me? Him? Like hell we are. . . And you know it yourself. . . You're just being stubborn, arguing for the sake of arguing. . . A detestable habit."

Georgi Akimovich's nose, brows, cheeks twitched.

"Why lose your temper? Sit down—come on, sit down a minute. We can talk without getting so excited." Igor sat down. "You say that one has to know how to retreat. Quite right. In Napoleon's time, too, we retreated right to Moscow. But then it was only territory we lost, and only a narrow strip at that. And Napoleon gained nothing but snow and burned villages. But now? No Ukraine and Kuban—that means no grain. No Donbas—no coal. Baku's cut off. The Dnieper Power Station is in ruins, thousands of factories are in German hands. What are the prospects? Today a country's economy is what counts. The army's got to be fed, clothed, shod, supplied with ammunition; I'm not speaking of the civilians, or of the good fifty million people we've lost—more than all of France. Have we the power to overcome all that—what do you say?"

"Yes, we have. . . Last year it was worse. The Germans got as far as Moscow but they were beaten back. . . ."

"But I'm not so sure that it was worse. Donbas, Rostov, the Kuban, Maikop were ours; now we haven't got them. The Volga communications are cut to all intents and purposes—do you realize the journey that Baku oil has to make now? You may say that we've got Kuzbas, Barnaul, the Urals. Quite right. That's a powerful industrial

network. But at the beginning of the war we had Krivoy Rog as well, Nikopol, Zaporozhye, Mariupol, Kerch, Kharkov. That's lost. Part of the factories we evacuated, but evacuating them doesn't mean having them running yet. And meanwhile you see what's happening. . . ."

A group of Junkers 88 bombers was passing over our heads. They slowly swung round and sailed off in another direction.

"They don't even have fighters with them. . . The swine come and go as they like. . . ."

For some time we were silent, watching the loathsome black planes with their yellow wings, so insolent in their assurance. Georgi Akimovich smoked cigarette after cigarette, staring after the vanishing aircraft.

Igor was sitting, throwing stones at a tin lying nearby, but missing it every time, he seemed quite absorbed.

Suddenly he got up.

"No, that can't be. They won't go any further. I know. . ." And he turned and left us.

It could not be—that was all that we could say for the time being.

It could not be.

After all, devil take it, there had been 1917 and 1918 and 1919! Things had been even worse then. Typhus, ruin, and starvation. Maxims and three-inch guns—and nothing more. And all the same we had come through. . . And then we had built the Dnieper Power Station and Magnitogorsk, and this factory that I was waiting to blow up. . . Georgi Akimovich would only smile at that, I knew. Smile condescendingly. When he talked about it, he spoke as though we were children, smiled and said that then, four years of war had exhausted other countries as well, that the French, British and German soldiers did not want to fight, and things of that kind.

Once he said:

"We shall fight to the last man, the Russians always do. . . But we haven't much chance, all the same. Only a miracle can save us, otherwise they'll crush us—with organization and tanks."

"A miracle?"

Not long before, soldiers had been passing during the night when I was on telephone duty and had gone out for a smoke. They sang softly as they marched. I could not even see them, I could only hear their tread and the soft, rather melancholy song about the Dnieper and cranes. I went closer. They were resting, lying on the flattened grass by the roadside under the acacias. Cigarettes glowed and died out, and a youthful voice sounded from somewhere behind a tree.

"No, Vassya, don't you try to tell me. You'll never find any soil better than ours. Like butter, it is rich." He even smacked his lips. "And the grain—it's over your head. . . ."

The town was flaming, crimson reflections played on the walls, a tommy gun rattled somewhere quite near, rockets soared up, and ahead was the unknown and almost certain death. . . .

I never saw the speaker—there was a command, a general movement, a rattling of messtins, and they were off with a slow, heavy soldier's stride—on their way to that unknown spot marked on the map with a red cross.

I stood there for a long time listening to their retreating tread. . . .

There are details which one remembers to the end of one's life, apparently unimportant trifles that seem to become a part of one, to live as symbols.

I remember a dead soldier. He was lying on his back, arms flung out, with a cigarette butt stuck to his lip. A tiny butt, still smoking. And that seemed the most awful thing that I had seen. More terrible than devastated towns, gaping bellies, arms and legs torn off—those outflung arms and the cigarette butt still smoking. A moment ago there had been life, thought, will. Now—death. . . .

And now, in that song, in those simple words about the soil that was rich as butter and the grain that grew over one's head, there was something. . . I don't even know what to call it. Tolstoy would have called it the hidden warmth of patriotism, and perhaps that is the best term. Perhaps that was the miracle that Georgi Akimovich was waiting for, something even stronger than German tanks, and organization.

I looked at him—small, yellow, in a shiny jacket, sitting hunched up on the steps with his thin, sharp knees drawn up. I thought that there must be a terrible muddle in his home—the children would irritate him, he would quarrel with his wife. Before the war, too, he had probably been impatient about all the petty drawbacks and inconveniences of life.

But the previous day I had seen a shell burst close to him when he was looking for a fault in the connections. It had burst about twenty paces away, but he had only stooped, slightly. He had bound up the torn wire and then again tested the whole line around the place where the shell had burst.

"You see," he told me later, "my whole life's in this factory. I came here for practical study when I was training, when people were still walking about with theodolites. The power station and the whole shop's grown up before my eyes. When generator 6 was set up, I didn't sleep for five nights—you know it, the American one, the second from the window. I know them all inside and out, all their ways. You understand what it means to me to blow that up? . . No, you can't understand it. . . You're soldiers—you just think it's a pity about the factory, and that's all. But for me. . . ."

He did not finish the sentence, but turned and went.

Six weeks ago Igor and I had been sitting by a long drinking trough watching our troops retreating. There had been no front. There had been roads with lorries travelling somewhere, and men tramping somewhere. . . .

That had been in July.

Now it was September; for ten days we had been in that factory, for ten days the Germans had been bombing the town—bombing it, that meant that the Red Army was still there. That meant that there was fighting. That meant that there was a front. That

meant that things were better now than in July. . . .

A shell burst near the power station. The dinner hour barrage was beginning—it always lasted from three to three-thirty exactly, with the precision of a chronometer. In half an hour we should be going to repair the wires. Valega and Sedykh took their messtins and ran for dinner. . . .

16

Two days later Goldstab appeared in our shelter with about ten officers.

We were sitting on the steps making celluloid cigarette cases—there was tons of celluloid of all kinds in the laboratory, and we clipped, filed and pasted all day long, only breaking off for dinner and to test the connections.

"Well, time to part company," said Goldstab, turning Igor's tiny case with a hinged lid over and over in his hands. "Sappers come to relieve you."

"And where do we go?"

"The other side—front headquarters, engineering unit."

Well, all the better. We handed over and half an hour later were crossing the rickety bridge over an arm of the Volga.

When I said goodbye to Georgi Akimovich, he shook my hand hard, winked, raised his brows and said:

"I'll often remember our talks on these steps. And I hope that everything I've tried to prove won't happen. After the war we'll meet and you'll say: 'Well, who was right,' and I'll say: 'You.'. . ."

He accompanied us to the path running down the steep red bank of the Volga, and stood there for a long time waving his cap.

Another person had crossed my path, leaving a small imprint in memory's book, and disappeared, probably for ever.

Later on we sat on the far side of the Volga on an overturned boat, looking at the smoking chimneys of the Tractor Plant—it had never stopped working for a moment, and Shapiro told us that in July it had turned out thirty tanks a day, in August fifty, and that now it was wholly engaged on tank repairs; he said that part of the equipment had already been sent to the Urals and more of it would be evacuated soon if they could only drive the Germans away from one of the bridges or wharves.

We spent the night in a tiny cottage buried in the forest, and all the next day searched for the forester's cottage, a landmark which would help us find engineer's headquarters.

There were so many headquarters of all kinds there that it was no easy matter to find ours. Everywhere, before every thicket there were sentries and signs—"Road Closed." Towards evening we found it, however—but not in any cottage, that existed only on the map. The command was in four dugouts. In one of them—so well camouflaged that we walked around it for ten minutes—sat a major with thick rimless glasses and a celluloid collar. He glanced through our papers and brightened visibly.

"Splendid! Excellent! And I didn't know what to do. Sit down. . . or no, better to go outside. There's no room to swing a cat here."

We learned from the major that just before we came—we hadn't met him, had we?—there had been a captain from the engineering unit of the 62nd Army. They had very few regimental engineers and their 184th Division was to cross the Volga that night; the division had lost an engineer and platoon commander during the morning's air raid. Nobody could be taken from the other divisions—they had sergeants acting as regimental engineers and nobody in reserve. The trouble they had had getting us from that Tractor Plant—they had made two applications for us.

"To cut it short—you're probably hungry? Go to our mess—straight along that path—have supper and come back here, while I get the papers ready. You'll be able to catch the division on this side."

We had some boiled rice with jam, and returned to the major, who was just addressing some envelopes.

"Which of you is Kerzhentsev?"

"I am."

"You go separately, to the 184th. I advise you to catch them here. At eight they'll cross, and tomorrow you'll have to hunt the front line for them." He held out an envelope.

"Try to see the divisional engineer, and then go to the regiment. But you'll see for yourself. . . ."

The others were sent to engineer headquarters of the 62nd Army.

"It's on the other side. It was in Banny Gulley yesterday. But I think it's moved. But it'll be somewhere round about there."

"And you don't need any more sappers in the 184th?" asked Igor. "You said that they'd lost a company commander."

The major looked at Igor through his thick glasses, that made his eyes owl-like.

"You're a senior lieutenant. We're sending you as engineer, we need them most of all just now." He scratched the bridge of his nose with a pencil, and added: "All of you except the one for the 134th might as well stop here, there's somebody from the 62nd coming tonight for spades—you can go back with him. Rest under the trees for the present."

We went out.

"Are you going on foot?" asked Igor.

"I'll go as far as the traffic control, and then I'll see."

"I'll come with you."

I took leave of Shapiro, Pengaunis and Samoilenko. Sedykh wrung my hand hard in his horny palm.

"We'll meet again, Comrade Lieutenant."

"Of course we shall," I said with forced cheerfulness. I would have very much liked to have taken him with me.

A few minutes later he overtook us.

"Take my cigarette case, Comrade Lieutenant. You didn't have time to finish yours. Mine's a good one, a double one."

He thrust a transparent yellow case into my hand—it was so large that I doubted whether it would go into my pocket. It would easily hold half a pound of tobacco. He wrung my hand again, then Valega's and mine once more. I was sorry to part with him.

We walked in silence to the traffic controller.

"The 184th hasn't passed yet. A sapper battalion went by not long ago, and since then nothing but trucks," he told me. He was an elderly man, with thin reddish moustaches and his large wing-like ears were covered with dust.

We sat down on the body of a disabled lorry and lighted cigarettes. The sun had set, but it was still light. Westward, over Stalingrad, the sky was crimson—either from the sunset or fire. Three columns of smoke were slowly ascending—dense and slender below, spreading out and thinning above, merging into an elongated cloud that hung motionless, absorbing all the smoke without increasing in density or size. It had hung like that for over a week above the burning town.

Around us golden larches stood out, slender, delicate, against a black background of forest. Lorries drove along the road, halted to find out how to go to the 62nd crossing or to Rybachy village, and went on. The broad dirt road was pitted with triangles and cubes from the many tires that rolled over it. It was hard to tell where it began and ended. A signpost that had once stood at the edge was now lying overturned in the middle, its finger with "Stalingrad 6 km." pointing skywards.

"The road to heaven," said Valega grimly. I had not known that he had a sense of humour.

The traffic controller came up to us.

"Look at the cranes flying," he said, pointing upwards with a rough, grimy finger. "The war doesn't exist for them. . . Can you spare any tobacco, Comrade Lieutenant?"

We gave him a smoke and lighted up ourselves, watching the black points in wedge formation flying slowly southwards. We could even hear their cries.

"Just like Junkers," said the transport officer and spat. "Makes me sick even to look at them. . . ."

Evidently we were all thinking the same thing, and we laughed.

"Well? Going or coming?" he asked, holding my hand steady as he lighted his cigarette from mine.

"Going."

He shook his head and took several long pulls.

"Yes. . . They say it's pretty hot over there . . ." and departed.

Wounded men were passing in ones and twos, grey and dusty, with weary, indifferent faces. One of them sat down and asked us for a drink. Valega gave him milk from his flask, and he drank it up slowly. He had a chest wound, and the dirty, bloodstained bandage on his hairy chest was visible through his torn tunic.

"Well, how's things there?"

"Lousy," he said dully, wiping his dry lips on his bloodstained hand with difficulty. In his grey eyes and his whole person there was only a terrible, deathly weariness, nothing more.

"They're pressing hard?"

"Down there you can't raise your head. . . ."

He tried to get up, but broke into a fit of coughing, and a rosy foam appeared on his lips. He slumped down again, breathing heavily. Something rattled in his throat or chest.

"Got no men. . . That's the devil of it. . . ."

"And who's in the town now? They or we?"

"The devil only knows where the town is over there. . . Everything's burning. . . They're bombing from morning till night. . . Give me another drink, old man, will you?"

Feebly, almost indifferently, he put his lips to the neck of the flask, and from the corner of his mouth flowed a thin trickle of bloodstained milk. Then he rose and left us, barely dragging his feet, helping himself along with a crooked, knotted stick.

Three mounted men rode up to the control point, and I sent Valega to find out if they were from the division we were looking for. He made his enquiries, with his hand at his cap, then returned.

"They say that the 84th has gone straight to the crossing. They're not from that division, but they saw some of the men."

The horsemen rode off, raising a cloud of dust.

"Well, I'd better go, then," said Igor.

"All right," I replied and held out my hand. We both felt that we should say something, but the words wouldn't come.

"I'm not going to say goodbye," Igor said.

"Nor am I."

We shook hands.

"Take care of yourself, Valega, and look after the lieutenant."

"Sure I will—what do you think?"

"Well, I'm off."

"Cheerio, Igorek."

"Oh, wait—I've got your pocket knife here."

"How's that?"

"I took it yesterday to cut some bread," he fumbled in his pocket. "Here it is, it was under the lining."

Igor held out the knife—Valega had got it, it was of best Sollingen steel with two blades, a corkscrew, a gimlet, a screwdriver and a number of mysterious instruments.

"Well, now that really is all. So long."

"Cheerio."

He turned and went, with his usual casual gait, with his cap on the back of his head and his hands in pockets.

Could it be that I would never see him again?

17

As usual, it was impossible to get a clear idea of anything at the crossing. There was a confused mass of horses, carts, guns and lorries all moving hither and thither in the darkness. And men —cursing, jostling, taking things from each other. Somebody ran into somebody else. Some boxes were smashed. Somebody was looking for Stetsenko. They were all waiting for the launch, swearing at it, it should have come long ago. . . .

Two divisions were being loaded simultaneously, it appeared—the 184th and some other, the 29th, I think.

In all this confusion I had to find some divisional engineer, or divisional commander, or chief of staff—hand over my papers and await further orders. And probably there would be none. Everybody had his hands full and head spinning . . . guns to be loaded, and ammunition, and horses, and the men kept together, and what the devil do you want, can't you see what's going on!

I found an engineer, but not the right one: a regimental commander, also not mine—from the 29th.

Somebody tugged at my sleeve.

"Listen, pal, got a flashlamp?"

"Yes."

"Give me a light, then. I'm all at sea. They gave me a map, but what's the use of it in this darkness. . . ."

I could just distinguish a massive figure in a padded jacket with a tommy gun slung round the neck.

"Let's get under this boat. . . Just two minutes, no more. . . ."

It was cramped under the boat, and smelt of rotting wood. I switched on my torch—it burned dimly, the battery was low. I now saw a large, heavy face with widely-set eyes and fleshy lips, and a captain's badges on a collar. He dragged his map out of his case with some difficulty. The map case was bursting with papers which were fastened with a rubber band.

"Now just try to make that out," and he flicked a red triangle on the map with his dirty nail. "Call that a map! A white oblong for a factory. Who can make anything of this?" And he cursed long and eloquently.

"Got to relieve a division. . . They said there'd be someone from there at the crossing, and devil a soul's here. . . And now to find that damned triangle in the town . . . their headquarters—the division's. Not a thing to help me. . . ."

I asked him which was his division. It turned out he was battalion commander of the 1147th regiment, 184th division.

"Wasn't it your engineer that was killed today?"

"Ours. Tsigeikin. Why?"

"I've been sent to replace him."

"What " The captain was delighted. "That's fine. Come with us. I'm all alone. The commissar's at the field hospital, and the chief of staff sees nothing at all at night. . . ."

We crawled out from under the boat.

"Wait a minute. I'll just check up on the horses. You know these corporals. . . ."

He disappeared, melting into the shouting crowd. I looked for Valega—he had settled down beside some boxes and was peacefully sleeping, his legs drawn up out of the way. He had a wonderful gift for being able to sleep anywhere and at any time. I sat down beside him. A cool breeze came from the river, bringing with it a smell of fish and oil. Horses clattered past, their harnesses rattling. Somewhere in the distance somebody was still looking for Stetsenko.

The town was burning, or rather, not the town but the whole bank as far as the eye could reach. This was like no other fire. That is probably how it is when the taiga burns—for weeks and months, for dozens, hundreds of kilometres. A rolling crimson sky. Black silhouettes, sharply etched. Two colours only—black and crimson—a black town and a crimson sky. And the Volga crimson—"like blood," flashed through my mind.

There were practically no flames to be seen—a few leaping tongues in one place, downstream. And opposite, were the cylinders of oil containers, looking like crumpled paper, with huge bursts of flame pouring from them—tearing away in fragments and losing themselves in the heavy, rolling, fantastic shapes of grey and red smoke.

When I was a child, I used to like looking through an old English magazine of 1914. It had no beginning, no end, but it had wonderful full page pictures—English tommies in the trenches, attacks, sea fights with frothing waves and ships colliding, and quaint Bleriots, Farmans and Taubes, like bookshelves, engaged in air-fights. I could hardly tear myself away.

But most terrible of all, one to give you goose flesh, was a huge picture covering the double centre page—showing Louvain burning after the German bombardments. There were flames, and clouds of smoke like cotton wool, and people running, and falling houses, and searchlights combing the menacing sky. . . In a word, it was so terrible and so gripping that I could not turn the page. I drew copies of that picture again and again, coloured them and hung them on the walls. I could imagine nothing more awful or magnificent.

I recalled that picture now. It had been a good representation. I can still remember every detail of it, every curl of smoke—but now I realized how powerless art can be. No clouds of smoke, no flames licking the sky, casting their lurid light around, could convey that feeling which gripped me now, sitting on the bank before burning Stalingrad.

There was fighting on the other side. Tracer bullets from machine and tommy guns buried themselves into the bank. Was it possible that the Germans had got to the river? A few long bursts sped across the Volga and lost themselves on my side. Then a Katyusha fired from some place behind me—we had seen eight of them on lorries on our way. The glowing shells sailed unhurriedly, overtaking each other in the lurid, vibrating sky, and burst somewhere on the opposite bank. I could not see the explosions, only the flashes, followed by the bursts.

Somebody beside me spat and cleared his throat. I had not noticed that some soldiers were lying full length near me.

"Did you have time to shoe the gelding?"

"Yes. And you?"

"I shod Buttercup, but I only did the forefeet of the black. He's hurt somewhere, won't let me near him. . . ."

The battalion commander approached, breathing heavily. "God, you can go clean crazy at this crossing. I've aged five years, I swear." He blew his nose loudly. "The general was here, he said definitely that we were to go first, and then the 29th. I only turned my back a second, and they'd got their cases on. Their artillery's already over, but the munitions were still here. But whose

fault was that? I always send ammunition together with every gun... God, that bastard again...."

The battalion commander disappeared once more, and I could hear him swearing at somebody. Then he returned.

"Oh, well... that's all a mere flea bite. We'll get over somehow. The thing is, what we'll find there."

It appeared that the regiment had orders to finish the crossing at two, and at four to relieve a division now almost non-existent in the Metiz-Mamayev-Kurgan district. It was now one, and not a single battalion had crossed; only the sappers, the scouts and operational headquarters were on the other side. The regimental commander and chief of staff were over too. The main thing was to get all the artillery to the front line by dawn, ready for point blank fire.

"Very good," I said. "Give me two companies and some scouts and you bring the artillery with the other company. How many men in a company?"

"About a hundred in each one."

"Splendid. That's settled then. Only give me the exact place."

"That damned triangle on the map... To be frank, I don't think there's anybody left there. That division hadn't more than a hundred men. They've been two weeks over there on that side."

He spat noisily and ran off to swear at somebody again. He had a voice that could have been heard on the opposite bank.

The motor boat approached—small and low, as though trying to huddle out of sight in the water, and pulling a clumsy barge with a long protruding rudder. It hung about for a long time before it could draw up, but at last the gangway was lowered. Wounded were disembarked—a long cautiously moving line, first the walking wounded, and then the stretcher cases. They were carried away somewhere into the bushes. Motor horns sounded.

Then boxes were loaded, guns rolled on board, horses stamped; one fell into the water, it was hauled out and led aboard again. Everything was unexpectedly easy and organized; I could not even hear my battalion commander.

Dawn was breaking as we cast off, and the solid dark mass behind us changed to a lacy pattern of larches. We were standing pressed tightly together, with someone breathing garlic into my face. The engines beat rhythmically under our feet. Valega looked at the burning town, his elbow supported on a greatcoat flung over the rail.

"It's a big place, all the same," said a voice behind my back. "Like Moscow."

"Not big, but long," replied a youthful, boyish voice. "Twenty-five kilometres long. I was there before the war."

"Twenty-five?"

"Exactly—from Sarepty to the Tractor Plant."

"Oho!"

"Why 'oho'?"

"Takes a lot of men to hold that—ten or fifteen divisions."

"And d'you think there are any less? There's more going over every night."

The boat took a sudden sharp curve, barely visible in the darkness. A mortar shell whistled down somewhere behind us and slapped into the water.

"The Jerries aren't so pleased we're coming, want to give us a bath."

The youthful voice laughed.

"Of course they do... what d'you think?" and he laughed again.

"The Jerries want a lot," put in a third, elderly voice. "But we can't go any further... got to the limit... to the end of the world... where can we go further...."

I heard somebody slap him on the back.

"Quite right, Dad. That's our way, the sailors' way. We're not intending to swim—water's too cold... Right?"

There was a general laugh.

I tried to turn my head, but it was very difficult in the crush. Out of the corner of my eye I could see part of a face and somebody's ear. We approached the bank.

18

Again the launch could not get right up to the wharf, and we jumped right into the cold, muddy water.

Cases were being dragged along the shore—they were lying about everywhere. Underfoot was a tangle of chains and hawsers. Wounded were lying on boxes or on the ground—huddled against each other, grim and silent.

The bank was flat and sandy at first, rising to an almost vertical cliff. Overhead—the smoky red sky. There was firing quite near-by—it sounded just behind our backs. It was chilly, and I put on my greatcoat.

The battalion commander—his name was Klishentsev—was shouting at somebody trying to turn a gun.

"What the devil do you want to push the carriage forward for? Where are your brains, you blockhead?"

The men splashed through the water with machine guns and mortars, shells dangling in front and behind, gathered in knots on the bank and of course lighted cigarettes. Klishentsev came running up to me, quite hoarse.

"Take the 4th and 5th and get off! I'll unload the guns, and follow you... Send me a runner so I won't waste time looking for you. There's one—Sidorko—he'll find anything. Ask Farber—commander of No. 5 company," and taking my collar, he drew me closer and whispered: "They say there's nothing left of that division... Try to find our scouts, they're somewhere there... Don't get into any fighting without me..." he pushed a flask into my hand. "Here, take a swig before you go." The vodka burned my throat pleasantly and seemed to run through me in fiery streams.

The commanders got their men together. One of them—Farber—was a tall, stooping man in spectacles, with a very short greatcoat; to judge by his talk, an intellectual... The other—Petrov—was thin, delicate and boyish. I was not too pleased at that.

We walked along the shore towards the town, our feet sinking in the sand, crouching when a mortar shell whistled. The men tramped along in silence breathing heavily, moving their feet with difficulty, steadying the dangling shells with their hands. They

had marched about forty kilometres that day.

We met some wounded, walking alone or in twos and threes, supporting themselves on their rifles. They asked where the crossing was.

Bullets were zipping by just over our heads and splashing into the water. A tracer bullet ricochetted high up and expired in the air.

"Where are the Jerries?" the men asked those we met. They pointed vaguely in the direction where we were going.

"Not far off. . . Nearer than home. . . ."

We passed a white building—with pipes leading from it—probably a water works. Then the road became steeper. A gun was being rolled down it by hand.

"Where are you going?" I asked. No reply.

"Where are you taking that gun?"

"And who d'you think you are? Can't you see what's happening? Leave it for the Germans, or what?"

I took out my revolver.

"About turn and back. . . ."

"Where?"

Somebody with an unbuttoned greatcoat and cap pushed carelessly to the back of his head tapped me on the chest.

"We've seen this sort before. . . Heroes. . . Don't take any notice, Katsura—pull it along!"

My throat contracted suffocatingly. Bullets were already hitting the bank.

At the top of the path—all I could see was a shattered railway barrier, a fallen telegraph post and a tangle of wires—several figures appeared, took cover behind the post, fired, and then ran back downhill.

Somebody pushed me with his shoulder and cursed. I turned and swung my fist into the white face before me.

"Back!" I shouted with all the force of my lungs, and ran up the path.

The Germans were just behind the railway line, which ran almost along the edge of the high bank. A train of oil tanks on the line were silhouetted against something burning, and one of our machine guns was firing under the truck wheels from somewhere on the right.

I crawled under the trucks; my gratecoat caught on something and tore. It was in the way, continually getting tangled up with my legs. My face pressed against the pleasantly cool rails, I tried to see where the Germans were. A broad, straight street ran perpendicular to the line; on the right were oil cisterns, with smoke pouring from one of them, and three large, ragged shell holes in the side, like open wounds. On the right was a scorched shed surrounded by barbed wire. The Germans were evidently in the cisterns—red, white and green flashes kept coming from there, and bullets rattled on their walls.

Farber crawled away. He crawled awkwardly, somehow sideways, raising himself and falling on his right side.

Several bullets singed into the tank just over my head, and a thin trickle of kerosene splashed onto the rail in front of me, spattering my face. A rocket soared up, illuminating the oil cisterns, the shed and a stone wall. Shadows played weirdly, spreading and shrinking, and then the rocket fell hissing somewhere behind us.

Time. . . I inserted two fingers into my mouth—I had lost my whistle near Kupyansk. I felt as though it were somebody else whistling, somebody beside me.

Now I was racing straight for the cistern with the three holes, shouting, right and left of me. Tommy guns rattling . . . tommy-gun drums in my greatcoat pocket banging my knees. . . Somebody in a round cap with ribbons was running in front of me, try as I would I could not overtake him. I could no longer see the cistern, only those dangling ribbons, impossibly long.

I was shouting too, running lightly, easily, my tommy gun vibrating against my stomach, my finger pressed tensely on the trigger till the joint ached.

More cisterns ahead, smaller ones, with pipes winding about them like snakes. There were a great many of them and we had to jump over them.

Behind the cisterns were the Germans. They came at us, shouting. The ribbons disappeared, replaced by a grey greatcoat and an open mouth. That disappeared too. My temples were beating and my jaw aching.

No more Germans in sight.

A white gate in front with iron fretwork. I ran to it, squatted, then on again. But I could not stop running. . . The gate was behind me, in front was an asphalt road and some sort of building.

Then I was lying prone, struggling to insert a fresh drum in my tommy gun with trembling hands. Something had jammed.

"It's smashed. . . Take this one. . . ."

Valega, probably, but I had no time to look round.

I was lying behind a low stone wall with fine wire netting on top. Through this I could see Germans running again, many of them. They were racing through a factory yard, firing from black tommy guns pressed to their stomachs. It was like some kind of weird fireworks—even in daytime they were using tracer bullets.

I fired off a whole drum, then another, and the fireworks disappeared. Suddenly everything was very quiet. I took a drink from somebody's flask, but could not relax my strained attention.

"Been eating salt fish, Comrade Lieutenant?" asked the man offering his flask—he was wearing a quilted jacket and a tiny, crumpled sailor cap with a forelock escaping from under it.

I drank the rest of the water—surely water had never been colder or more refreshing—and looked round for Valega. He was beside me, slipping in a new drum, empty cartridge cases lying in golden mounds around him. Beside him a round-faced fellow was smoking with nervous haste, in hurried puffs. Then he spat on the cigarette butt and jammed it into the ground.

Before me was the smooth, asphalt factory yard, beyond it a heap of mangled iron, a locomotive with smashed trucks and some sort of white building like a railway hut with a tiny balcony. Beyond was more yard—large and empty.

A vile place—no cover, no chance to dig in—only the low wire fence.

We would have to get that hut and the

iron, that was clear, we could not stop where we were. I gave the order to Farber and Petrov, who were beside me. The man in the quilted jacket inserted capsules into round grenades.

"That's the stuff," and he winked with one of his black, narrowed eyes. "I know that hut. . . Grand place, and a cellar—all we want!"

"You've been there?"

"All night, till Jerry pushed us out. They came yesterday—scouts, looking for headquarters. . . ."

He put the grenades into his pocket, hanging one onto his belt.

Farber announced that he was ready, Petrov, a moment later. The Germans opened machine-gun fire from somewhere to the left. Dug in already, the swine. Had to hurry before any more got going.

The man in the quilted jacket crouched, one leg under him, the other out behind, like a sprinter waiting for the signal, watching me tensely from out of the corner of his eye. Something was tattooed on his left arm below the elbow—a name.

I gave the signal.

Something dark flashed quickly before my eyes, plaster tumbled down from the wall, the wire vibrated as though under a blow. The man in the quilted jacket was racing straight for the hut, waving his tommy gun; it was over sixty yards across a bare open space.

Suddenly it was filled with running, shouting figures—green, black, striped. The man in the jacket was already at the hut, he disappeared through the door. The Germans opened disorderly fire, then stopped, and I could see them running behind the hut. It was easy to recognize them by their broad, unbelted greatcoats.

All this had happened too quickly to give me time to think. There was nobody near, only Valega and myself. Somebody's cap was lying on the grey asphalt.

We crawled through the wire fence and ran, stooping, to the hut. Three or four killed were lying in the yard, prone, faces invisible.

Near the hut was a long trench, that lost itself among the iron. We jumped into it. Somebody was going through the pockets of a dead German.

"What are you doing?"

The man turned his head without rising, and two small grey eyes looked up at me from a dark, pimply face.

"What d'you mean? Getting booty. . . ."

He pushed something hastily into his pocket, fumbling with a dangling chain. A watch, evidently.

"Quick march from here! Don't let me see hair nor hide of you again."

Somebody tapped me on the shoulder.

"That's one of my scouts, Lieutenant. Not so hasty. . . ."

I turned round, and saw the man in the quilted jacket, a cigar in his mouth. His angrily narrowed eyes flashed under his forelock.

"And who are you?"

"I?" His eyes narrowed still more, and a muscle twitched on his rough, sunburned cheek. "Commander of the infantry reconnaissance Chumak." With an imperceptible movement of his lips he rolled his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other.

"Put a stop to this loitering at once. Understand?" I spoke slowly and with unnatural calm. "Get your men together and place sentries. Clear?"

"And who are you to give orders?"

"You heard what I said? I'm a lieutenant, and you're a corporal. That's enough. . . And no booty till I give permission."

He made no reply, but stood looking at me. He had a narrow face, and his thin lips were tightly compressed. The forelock was hanging right over his eyes. He stood there, legs astride, hands in pockets swaying slightly back and forth.

So we stood, staring at each other. If he did not turn and go at once, I was prepared to draw my revolver.

Tsvick—tsvick. . . .

Two bullets flew straight into the trench wall between us. I squatted. One of them had struck something hard, and was spinning like a top by my feet. The scout did not even stir. His thin lips twitched a little and there was mockery in his eyes.

"Doesn't suit you, eh, Lieutenant?"

With a lazy, accustomed movement he twitched his cap forward over his eyes, turned unhurriedly and went, swaying slightly from side to side, his trousers drawn tightly over his bulging rear.

Two men came dragging a machine gun. The trench was narrow, and the gun stuck.

"What the devil do you think you're doing here, blocking the way;" I shouted at them, it irritated me the way they stood silent and blinking. They pressed themselves to the wall to let me pass.

"Well, what have you stopped for? Get it on. . . ."

They immediately seized the carriage and tried to pull the gun further. I crawled over it and made my way along the trench.

"Like a dog that's broken its chain," I heard one of them say.

I turned to the right. The men were already digging in, Petrov fussing about, shouting at the men, struggling to place the machine gun which kept slipping.

He was still very young, evidently not long out of training school. He had a thin neck and broad jackboots that were too loose for his legs.

"What do you think, will that do, Comrade Lieutenant?" he asked, shoving a box under the machine gun, and looked enquiringly at me with his blue eyes.

"All right, it'll do."

"And my second one's there, beyond the bend. Would you like to have a look at it? It commands the whole embankment."

We went—it really did command the whole stretch. The Germans were beyond the embankment, and sometimes a helmet would peep up.

I squatted to write my report. Companies four and five and the infantry scouts platoon had taken over the defence on the western border of Metiz works. So many men, so much ammunition. I made the last figures a little less, although I could hardly count on fresh supplies that day.

Sidorko, whom Klishentsev had recommended—an alert fellow, slant-eyed, with a rather Chinese look—had barely time to stuff the report into his cap when the Germans began to attack.

Tanks appeared from somewhere; there were six of them, coming from the right, from behind the embankment. Evidently a bridge there that we couldn't see. We had only four anti-tank rifles and a couple of dozen grenades. That was all. . . Where was that gun? I had quite forgotten it. Could they have made off again? . . Our only hope now was the iron. Maybe the tanks would not get over it. . . .

Beside me was a sunburned tankbuster, with a ferocious wavy ginger moustache. He evidently felt hot, he kept throwing off one thing after another—quilted jacket, tunic, shirt, leaving a surprisingly white chest exposed.

It was cramped and awkward in the trench. People kept passing, banging their knees, swearing.

Tanks making straight for us. . . .

Bad that there's no telephone. Difficult to know what's happening everywhere.

The tanks halt at the iron and open fire, the shells falling somewhere behind. Duds, evidently—no explosions to be heard. Chumak's voice from somewhere to the right—sharp and vibrating shouting to some Vanyushka to get anti-tank grenades.

"In the cellar . . . in the corner . . . where the kettle's standing. . . ."

One of the tanks crawls over the iron, and makes straight for us, treads grinding, swaying from side to side, showing its repulsive black cross. The half-naked tank buster takes aim, legs astraddle, seat braced against the side of the trench. His cap has fallen off, leaving a white circle on his sunburned, shaved head.

"Will he get it or not?"

The cross approaches. . . ."

Somebody shouts right into my ear, I cannot make out a word.

"What's that?"

"Germans flanking us on the left. Infantry, to the left of the locomotive. . . ."

"Why aren't the machine guns firing? There're two of them there."

I run along the trench. Petrov and somebody else are busy with the machine gun—jammed, the belt won't go in. . . .

"Why's the second gun silent?"

Childlike blue eyes looking ready to cry.

"Honest, I don't know. . . Five minutes ago. . . ."

"Grenades! Get grenades!"

Bullets are zipping right above my head .

I hurl the grenades one after the other, German ones, with long handles—pull the cord and hurl them over the breastwork. The Germans are right by the trenches. Shouting.

Why won't that machine gun work?

A-a-a-a-a-a!

Something falls onto me. . . I jump away, hurl a grenade. . . Nothing more in my hands.

. . . Something heavy drops into the bottom of the trench. I hurl four more grenades—my last, no more. Where's my tommy gun, devil take it? . . I try to jerk my revolver from its holster, the strap catches, it won't come out. . . The devil . . . .

Then suddenly. . . .

A moment ago I was surrounded by whistling, jumping, shouting, groaning. And now—silence. . . .

At my feet somebody in a grey greatcoat lies, face jammed into a corner of the trench. . . Before the trench—nobody . . empty. . . Can we have driven them off?

I ran back along the trench. Bolts were clicking. Everything was the same. . . Petrov was at his machine gun . . . .

"Everything in order, Comrade Lieutenant. . . It's working."

His childlike blue eyes were merry, laughing.

"Did you see how I peppered them? Ran like rabbits. . . ."

He turned to the machine gun and fired a burst, his thin neck vibrating. How thin it was, with a deep indentation behind, and his collar was too big—the neck seemed to slip from side to side in it.

That was how he had probably stood in front of the class at the blackboard not so very long before, blinking his blue eyes when he had not known what to answer the teacher.

"And why wouldn't that one work? You've got something to do with that too, I fancy."

The blue eyes dropped, embarrassed.

"I'll go and find out at once, Comrade Lieutenant. . . ."

He rose, supporting himself on the barrel of the machine gun. His hands, too, were thin, childlike, freckled.

"I think. . . ."

Suddenly his eyes became fixed as though he saw something unusually interesting, and slowly, sideways, he slid down to the ground.

I had not even heard the shot. The bullet struck him in the forehead, between the brows.

He was dragged away, the thin legs in their boots too big for them bumping helplessly over the ground. There was already another man standing at the machine gun, a man with a thick, red neck. I appointed the political officer company commander, and went back to the white hut.

The Germans were quiet, evidently preparing for the next attack. Dead men were dragged along the trench, so that they should not hinder the living, and were laid in a slit at the side. I moved to make way for two stooping figures carrying somebody. A smooth, white arm with sunburned hands like gloves dangled to the ground. I could not see the face, it was covered with blood. The shaven head was hanging, and there was a white circle left by the cap. I recognized my whiskered tank buster. He was taken to the slit too, and laid on somebody with bloodstained trousers and an aluminium spoon sticking out of his puttees.

I had no time to get to the white hut before the Germans attacked. We beat them off. Again they attacked . . . and again. . . .

So it went on till dinner time—twenty or thirty minutes' quiet, a smoke, cartridges loaded into the drums and belts, a piece of bread, and again. . . Again grey figures, shouts, noise, confusion. . . .

Once Heinkels bombed us from a great height—we had not even seen them. But the

bombs fell upon their own men, and we laughed.

Sidorko still had not returned, nor had the two others I had sent later. Perhaps they had been killed by bombs—the roar of engines in the air never ceased for an instant. From the height we could plainly see the white clouds on the bank.

After dinner our artillery began pounding the embankment, and several stray shells fell into our trenches.

The Germans were not daunted. They sent no more tanks—the one with the cross remained immobile on the iron. They withered us with mortar fire, and our casualties were heavy. The slight wounds we sent to the bank, the serious cases were taken to the hut cellar, a roomy place with a reinforced concrete top.

By nine o'clock the Germans began to relax, and by ten everything was quiet, with only an occasional bullet zipping by.

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In the cellar the air was foul, with smoke hanging in layers. A floating wick smoked in a saucer. The wounded men—the cellar was packed with them—were begging for water and there was none. It had to be brought from the Volga, and half of it spilled on the way.

Valega gave me a piece of bread and fat, which I ate without any appetite. I wanted a drink.

Chumak came in, untidy, with jacket torn, and sat down on the corner of the table without looking at me. He pulled his jacket off over his head, revealing a sunburned, muscular chest, with an eagle carrying a woman in its claws tattooed in the middle, a drawn sword on the left and a skull and crossbones on the shoulder. There was a small round hole, hardly bleeding below his elbow—the bone had not been touched, for he could move his hand. Marusya, the nurse, a stout red-cheeked girl who wore a double kerchief, bandaged the wound.

Chumak had two tanks to his credit that day. One he had disabled himself, the other one belonged to the freckled scout about whom we had had words.

I asked him why he did not report.

"What's there to report about?"

"About today. About your losses. It's customary in the army to report after a battle."

Chumak turned slowly away. I could not see his face. His back with the deep furrow along the spine glistened with sweat.

"Too much trouble—you saw it all yourself, the sun's bright enough, and losses, well, I lost the sailor, and that's all. Any more questions?"

"Yes. Only not here. Come out for a minute."

"Bullets out there. May get killed."

I swallowed it and moved towards the entrance. He followed.

Leaning his shoulder against the door jamb, he chewed a cigarette.

"You know what, Comrade Lieutenant? Let's keep the peace. Don't touch the scouts, I swear it's better. . . ."

"Better or worse—that's another question. How many men have you?"

"Twenty-four. I had, and I still have. And as for the scouts I advise you. . . ."

"Who got the tank?"

"Whoever it was—what's the odds?"

"You got it?"

"Well, all right, me if you like . . . not you, anyway. . . ."

"Tell me how you disabled it."

"God, I want to get to sleep. We'll talk about tanks after the war. . . ."

"I advise you to remember that I'm acting battalion commander."

"How do I know that?"

"I'm telling you."

"The battalion commander's Klishentsev. Besides, I'm subordinate only to the regimental commander and the reconnaissance officers."

"They're not here now, and therefore you're subordinate to me. I'm the engineer and assistant regimental commander."

Chumak looked at me from the corner of his sharp eyes.

"Instead of Tsigeikin, is that it?"

"Yes, instead of Tsigeikin."

A pause.

"Well. . . We're usually the best friends with the sappers."

"I hope it'll stay that way."

"I hope so."

"What's the name of the man that got the other tank?"

"Korf."

"Private?"

"Private."

"Was that his first tank?"

"No, his fourth. He got his first three near Kastornaya."

"Decorated?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Devil alone knows. I sent in a recommendation."

"Hand me another within an hour. For him and for others. Understand?"

That ended the conversation, which had been carried on with the greatest restraint.

"Have I your permission to go, Comrade Engineer and Assistant Regimental Commander?"

I said nothing and went down. My whole body was aching, my eyes burned—probably from the thick smoke.

I made out my report. Farber was sitting beside me, his head on his arms. He had run down for a moment to get some tobacco and report his losses and fallen asleep over his open pouch with a half-smoked cigarette in his mouth. Somebody was talking quietly in a corner, puffing at a cigarette. I could just catch disjointed phrases:

"And mine had stuck, I had to kick it free with my heel. Then I turned to ask Pavlenko for cartridges and he was lying there with his face on the ground and something grey oozing out. . . ."

Suddenly Igor appeared in front of me, laughing. His moustache was no longer small and black, but big like the tank buster's, with a dashing curl at the corners of the mouth. I asked him how he had got there, but he said nothing, only laughed. On his chest was a blue eagle with a woman in its claws, right on his tunic, and the eagle had screwed up its eyes and was laughing too. I must stop it laugh-

ing, I must tear it from the tunic. I reached out, but somebody touched my shoulder, shook me.

"Lieutenant . . . Lieutenant. . . ."

I opened my eyes.

An unshaven face . . . cold grey eyes . . . straight bony nose . . . hair brushed back under a cap . . . an ordinary tired face, the eyes rather too cold.

"Wake up, Lieutenant, your hair'll catch fire."

The saucer with the wick was right by my head, smoking intolerably.

"What do you want?"

The grey-eyed man took off his cap and put it beside me on the table.

"My name's Abrosimov. I'm regimental chief of staff."

I rose.

"Sit down," he said. "You're Lieutenant Kerzhentsev? The new engineer, replacing Tsigeikin—I understood that from your report."

"Yes."

He passed his hand over his face, his eyes, and looked at the smoky flame for some moments without blinking. I felt that he was as deadly tired as I was.

I made a full report, and he listened attentively, without interrupting, tracing lines on the table with his nail.

"So Petrov's killed?"

"Yes. A sniper, probably. Straight in the forehead."

"H'm. . ." He bit his upper lip.

"In general, the casualties are pretty heavy. Twenty-five killed, about fifty wounded. One machine gun out of action—a splinter."

"And who are your neighbours?"

"Second battalion of our regiment on the left, on the right. . . ."

I thought—Farber had told me, but it had slipped my memory.

"On the right the forty-fifth, Comrade Captain," Chumak thrust in—he was standing beside me, hands in pockets. "One of their's came over to us, we've made contact. . . ."

"The 45th," said Abrosimov thoughtfully and rose, buttoning up his quilted coat.

"Well, Kerzhentsev . . . defence, and later . . . later you'll have to take over the battalion."

He looked at me fixedly, still fastening his buttons. They were too big and went into the holes with difficulty.

"Klishentsev—the battalion commander—has been killed. A bomb. Direct hit. You'll have to take over temporarily. Nothing to be done. . . ."

He turned to Chumak.

"The chemical officer's lost a leg. He's gone back across the river. Well, let's go, Engineer, or rather, Battalion Commander."

It was only when we went out that I noticed two runners in the corner with gold stars on their caps cut from meat tins.

We climbed the steps to the exit. I recognized the sentry at the door, his name was Kalabin, he had a large birthmark on his cheek and was a good shot. I had seen him get four Germans. He was from Kostroma and his wife was expecting a child.

It was cool outside, and I filled my lungs with the fresh air. The sky was clear and star-filled, with the Great Bear hanging over Mamayev Kurgan. A plane was just overhead, it seemed to be hanging in one spot. Then it flew off towards Mamayev Kurgan. Rockets soared up to the right, probably over the Red October Mill—about ten of them, bursting in golden rain. There was absolute silence, no firing.

We walked along the trench. Figures stood huddled in greatcoats, rifles rested on the breastwork. The plane was bombing somewhere beyond Mamayev Kurgan—I could see the flashes. German searchlights swept the sky. The disabled tanks—we had managed to get three that day—were still burning, and the wind drove the foul smoke into our trenches.

I took leave of the captain on our left flank by a gap in the wall. After that came the second battalion.

"Well, keep your eyes open, Battalion Commander. Things'll be hot again tomorrow. . . We'll send cartridges, and the guns'll be here by morning. It'll be better with them."

He went off with his runners towards a half-ruined building, our neighbours' headquarters. For some time I could see them jumping over the iron, and then they disappeared.

Supporting my elbows on the breastwork, I looked towards the Germans. Everything over there was quiet and dark. In one spot a tiny spark waxed and waned—a careless sentry smoking. Or perhaps it was something smouldering. . . .

How quiet it was. . . .

And tomorrow things would be hot again. . . Aircraft, shouting, noise and clatter. . . .

Despite everything we had held them today, only in one place had the Germans pushed us back a little, on Farber's section the right flank. Forty metres. I'd have to send the hook-nosed lieutenant with his platoon over there—what was his name, Ramov? Seemed a good fighter. . . I had liked the way he had gone about it today. And at 3 a.m.—we'd counter-attack. . . .

There was another sentry at the hut now—a small man with his groundsheet trailing the ground, I did not know who he was.

The telephonist was swearing into his instrument.

"Marble! I'm Granite. D'ye hear me? Marble, Marble! Son-of-a-bitch, gone out to smoke again. Marble, Marble!"

A pile of straw shone yellow in a corner. Valega, of course, taking care of me. I flung myself down. Two hours, a whole two hours to sleep. Sleep like the dead.

"Wake me at two, Valega . . . or a quarter past. . . . "

I heard no reply, I sank into something soft, with a warm, animal smell, and was asleep instantly.

(To be continued)

Translated by Eve Manning

ALEXANDER TVARDOVSKY

Alexander Tvardovsky was born in a village in Smolensk province in 1910. His father, the village blacksmith, was a well-read man; his mother was possessed of a beautiful voice and loved to sing the ancient folk songs of the region. From early childhood the poet grew up in an atmosphere teeming with love of art and desire for learning. The October Revolution made higher education available to him.

While Tvardovsky was still an undergraduate his poem *The Land of Muravia* was being studied in colleges specializing in literature throughout the Soviet Union; indeed, the young poet might easily have been confronted with his own work in an examination paper.

This uncommonly early and apparently premature fame had its history: Tvardovsky began to write poetry when still in his early teens and a great deal of it was printed. His *Prelude* and *Road to Socialism*, for example, are immature works and cannot be regarded as representative of the first period in Tvardovsky's career. They represent an early stage in his literary biography but not in the growth of his poetic talent. When we look back, however, it is not difficult to trace a certain definite tendency, even a program in the very crudeness of this initial stage.

Today Tvardovsky delights us with his poetic talent, with the easy, melodious swing of his rhythm. His early verses, on the contrary, were "immelodious", deliberately prosaic. The young Tvardovsky evidently assumed that he had invented a new rhyme—colloquial, simple, deprived of all poetical convention.

But he was mistaken: he was by no means an innovator in the art of versification. In those days his poetry lacked the true organic character which distinguished Mayakovsky's verses although they did not conform to the conventional understanding of rhythm. Tvardovsky's poems too openly revealed the planned intention of breaking the flow of poetic measure (the struggle against the inherent desire for precise metre) and even a certain artificiality in the prosaic diction he used. Nevertheless, Tvardovsky was right with regard to the most important factor: prose in the true rational philosophical meaning was to become and did become the axis around which his poetical genius revolved.

Unfortunately very little of the reams that have been written about the conventional borderlines separating prose from poetry, is really instructive. It is not a matter of "borderlines" or of formal differences, but of the actual fact of the existence of two fairly well defined artistic viewpoints, mutually interrelated and mutually enriching each other. To emphasize the prose nature of *Eugene Onegin* Pushkin gave his poem the sub-title of "a novel in verse."

An interest in the "objective relation of phenomena" helped the poet to give his verses a special form adapting them for the reproduction of "prose" content. This influenced the entire structure of *Onegin*, not so much in its externals as in its content. The same applies to Nekrasov's poems and for the same reason. It is perfectly clear that the different forms and genres used, and where necessary, invented by the artist are directly influenced by the inner relations to reality which they are designed to express.

Nikolai Gogol's words can be applied to every true poet with a certain aptitude: man "does not know a tenth part of that which his soul knows." Timidly and still rather clumsily giving his verses a prose structure, the 19-year-old author of the *Road to Socialism* was in reality saturating his verse with the inner meaning and content of prose, adapting his gift for poetry in order to capture the "objective relations of phenomena." He could not have done otherwise, thanks to the essence of his artistic and philosophical world-outlook.

Tvardovsky was often called a poet-"chronicler". Few Soviet poets have such an excellent knowledge as he has of the life of the Soviet village, of the collective farmers' way of thinking and of the old-time, individual peasant, the various and profound mental stirrings and crises that in its time accompanied the reconstruction of the Soviet village.

The village life which confronted Tvardovsky at the end of the twenties and beginning of the thirties required a specific approach. The life of the old Russian village had been shaken to its foundations and, therefore, naturally could not be depicted as it had formerly developed and expressed itself. Tvardovsky is not so much the poet of a certain social system, of a state of society, as he is of social movement and growth. In this sense, he is a poet-historian rather than a chronicler; in other words, he is a profoundly sober (i. e., historically minded) interpreter of our contemporary social movements and events. He has nothing in common with those "bards of pastoral life," who even when they see beyond the narrow sphere of commonality do not look ahead but glance back to a still "simpler and immutable life", idealizing the moss of the tombstones instead of the fresh green shoots of human history. From this point of view, Tvardovsky's early poems were historical, notably his *Land of Muravia.*

In that same Russian village in which, at a first glance, history was only a legend (". . . here, they say, Napoleon passed, on his way to Moscow . . .") in which nothing seemed to have changed, where "the bells rang through 20 villages" and the signboard of the innkeeper "creaked over the porch," "of the village notable," Ilya Bugrov, here, in that same village, history suddenly became a living phenomenon, a tangible force both creative and destructive.

Tvardovsky was able to write inspiredly of the Russian village of those years when everything was still in ferment, when nothing had yet settled into an habitual mode of life but was still in the process of development.

Nikita Morgunok, the main figure in the poem is frightened by the break-up of the old mode of life in the village based on private property. To him, the ancient "peasant truth" means acquiring the oppulence of the kulak Bugrov. But the collective farm system is being introduced into the village. Morgunok does not agree with these new ideas and searches for the imaginary Land of Muravia where there are allegedly neither collective farms nor communes. During this strange pilgrimage to the "promised land" he becomes convinced that for him, a peasant of average means, there can be no common truth with the kulak Bugrov. The real truth is the Bolshevik truth, the people's truth expounded by the chairman of the collective farm, Andrei Frolov. The collective farm which he organized is the Land of Muravia, i. e., life in accordance with the ancient "peasant" truth, the ancient truth of the people.

Across the years, this poem of Tvardovsky answered the questions raised in Nekrasov's poem *Who Lives Well in Russia*? i.e., the Russian working-peasant who has conquered his "second soul," the soul of the covetous owner.

It would seem that it were easy to give this answer which has long become an inseparable part of Soviet statehood and theory, but it was not easy for the artist-realist to write about it so that the reader should feel how the peasant mind reached this historical conclusion of its own accord; in other words, that this answer should not be merely an illustration of a profoundly just political outlook, but should be a chain of emotional arguments revealing to us the road which brought Nikita to the new truth. Even though history's final judgement was already clear to reason, here it was elucidated anew through the arguments of real feelings, not without some faltering of heart and will, as the result of fraternal sympathy of the poet for the hero.

In connection with the *Land of Muravia* I would like to say a few words about Tvardovsky himself who always thinks and feels like his heroes. It seems to me that Tvardovsky, like his hero Morgunok (and the more because he was born a poet), was closely influenced by those first impressions of life and that mode of life which surrounded him from childhood. The poetry of life was revealed to him within the confines of a small peasant holding. This was his poetry, or rather the key to poetry. Another poet, gifted with the naivete of the hero of the *Land of Muravia* would perhaps, together with Nikita Morgunok have asked history for a delay, for at least a temporary respite (as a poet, of course) in the world of private property. But Tvardovsky did not wish, either as a citizen or as a poet, to connect himself or his talent with the past. He had said goodbye to the past forever. He had broken with this past not only because it would not harmonize with the new contemporary life in the Soviet village, but also because the new collective farm life brought with it a new, higher poetry.

As a poet and a citizen Tvardovsky strives to master this new life together with the new poetry that belongs to it. This truly popular, profoundly human understanding of the life of the people gives the *Land of Muravia* and perhaps to all Tvardovsky's poetry their inner fervour and chief beauty. This in its way is didactics of the highest form. It is nothing less than the struggle for the new traditions, for the acceptance by one and all of the positive experience accumulated by the Soviet people. True art plays a powerful part in the establishment of these traditions.

For the same reason that the poet deprives the savage, bestial olden times (as personified by the rich man Bugrov, later a vagabond, horse-thief and traitor to his own son) of all semblance of nobility he endows the new, Soviet village with a high degree of nobility. This is the secret of Tvardovsky's realism, his historical method. The people of whom Tvardovsky has always felt himself a part, their son and their poet, in the best and fullest sense of the word, have broken with this evil past, have turned to the new life and the new truth—socialism.

It is not surprising that Tvardovsky, who is so intimately bound up with the people, who is the lyrical spokesman of the people, in portraying them, their lives, and himself, is at his best in works, in which central events in the life of the people are reflected in summarized form. In this respect he resembles Sholokhov who also devoted his three major works—*And Quiet Flows the Don, The Soil Upturned, They Fought for the Homeland*—to the three outstanding historical events in the life of the people and consequently in the life of the Don Cossacks so well known to him. The Civil War, the establishment of the collective system of farming in the Soviet villages and finally the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45 form the themes of these fundamental epics.

Similarly, Tvardovsky followed his collective farm poem *The Land of Muravia* by a book about the soldier *Vassili Terkin* which won greater and more immediate popularity with the Soviet reader than his first poem. The book, in reality, has no plot. It consists of separate battle episodes in all of which the invulnerable Vassili Terkin, a rank-and-file soldier and hero, takes part. These episodes are taken from the road of battle travelled by the Red Army from the Volga to Berlin, and reveal the heroism of the Soviet people. There is a certain element of chance in the composition and hence apparently in the very creation of *Vassili Terkin*. It seems that in beginning work on this new poem the author had not yet plumbed all the depths, measured the full scope of this happily chosen theme. Hence the abundance of deviations, of commentaries given by the author to his living, expressive sketches which without the support of these, lyrical yet wise comments would have remained only thumbnail sketches (of which there are not a few in Tvardovsky's front-line note-books).

In the end the author succeeded in subordinating all the chapters and lines of *Vassili Terkin* to a certain unity of plot and form, in turning the very element of chance into something essential and logical, something organic and noteworthy, almost philosophical, which determined the nature of the poem. It seems that every accidental episode, conversation and joke is connected by invisible threads to the very soul of the life of the people. We do not know whether this was the original concept of *Vassili Terkin* and it does not matter. The important fact is that this is how the book was finished, this is how Tvardovsky worked on it, with a constant understanding of the profound, not the superficial, of the importance to the whole nation of the events taking place; he expresses ecstatic joy at the fact that the true meaning and everlasting rock-bottom of the life of the people are so clearly shown in any external movement of this life.

Vassili Terkin is a book for and about the people. It is not only written for the people but was created in living cooperation with them. In other words it is permeated by those "improvisations" (to quote the term used by the well-known Russian novelist Leskov) which the Russian people always favoured. In tsarist Russia such popular "improvisations" were frequently of the nature of polemics with the existing system, carried out in the witty manner of ascribing non-existent qualities and circumstances to reality. The stories and anecdotes which the people invented for their own edification during the war and which Tvardovsky amassed in his book, contrary to the improvisations of a polemical nature familiar to us in the past, all contain a consistent and convincing acknowledgement of the rightness of our whole country, our system, our rulers, generals and every soldier "fighting not for glory but for life on earth."

The aim of the popular tales improvised at the front is to preserve and restore the moral health of the people and the army at the time of the greatest of physical and moral trials which fell to the lot of the Soviet Union. These guileless "self-consoling" folk tales, optimistic in their majestic tragedy, form the foundation on which *Vassili Terkin* is built up.

You can't carry on 'tween strafings
Without the makings for a smoke;
Nor, believe me, without laughing
At some wise old crack or joke.

What's the thing you need most, soldier,
Makes life's living worth the while?
Truth, my lad—truth, stark and staring,
Truth, your very heart-strings tearing,
Truth, that's best straight from the shoulder
though it taste like bitter bile.

In the author's own words *Vassili Terkin* is a book about the bitter truth. That is true. Death and destruction are within a stone's throw of all that occurs in it.

We cannot forget this bitter truth, this memento mori when we are reading *Vassili Terkin*. There is no reason why it should be forgotten. It had to be withstood and overcome. The art of overcoming the bitter truth—that is what lies behind *Vassili Terkin's* humour, which like the whole book bears the imprint of the life of the people. This wonderful, courageous humour is an integral part of the Soviet character.

All this is easily understandable. The Soviet socialist state has been in danger more than once and has often demanded great sacrifices from the people. With equal clarity we see before us both the nearness of the great goal and the temporary and long-term difficulties with which we have encountered and will still have to encounter on our way to the bright and better future. Joy, however, is uppermost. To live for an aim, of the grandeur and beauty of which one is finally convinced, is in itself a great happiness. The greatest hardships are willingly borne for the sake of such happiness. They are well understood but conquered by humour, that is by the feeling of moral and mental superiority over the imperfections of reality.

This idea was well expressed on a certain occasion by the late Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin: "When people say about me—this man has had a hard life—I must say I do not like it. If a man has mastered the Communist viewpoint, it fills his life with such rich content that this life does not seem hard but seems rich, and, most important of all, you yourself

feel that it is boundlessly good, even at the most difficult moments." Wonderful words, dear to the heart of every Soviet citizen. Such a feeling and the undying faith of the people in the final triumph of truth are the sources of the profoundly patriotic humour of the Soviet people. This humour, which proved itself of such worth during the grim waryears, is in reality the true lyrical hero of *Vassili Terkin*. Priceless humour permeates each one of the episodes in the poem, beginning with the artless stories *Who Fired?* and *Terkin's Leave* (which apart from the poem would have passed as excellent newspaper features in verse) and ending with the monumental *Death and the Soldier* where the immortal "trench friendship", strengthened by the new Socialist friendship of the peoples, is stronger than death itself. But even through this tale, legendary in its scope and depth of conception, runs the thread of the same familiar, colloquial Russian speech, the same gentle but triumphant smile of superiority, present even here in the face of very near and imminent destruction. Tvardovsky possesses the rare ability of portraying the entire depths and at the same time the grandeur of human passions, thoughts and feelings without interrupting the structure of a simple folk tale. One of the most wonderful chapters in the book is *The Accordion* full of swift, rollicking wayside merriment. But before breaking into the gay dance tune the musician played another song, the song of the tragic death of his three comrades. The humour of *Vassili Terkin* and the whole humour of the people, reflected in this book, is remarkable for the tremendous moral energy which it covers, the energy to struggle against and overcome the countless trials of life. This is the victorious humour and the humour of the victor.

Tvardovsky's latest poem *The Roadside House* was written parallel to *Vassili Terkin*. It deserves the most careful analysis. In the perfection of its verse it is practically the best thing Tvardovsky has done. The rhymes are polished, elegant and simple. Tvardovsky's poetry is frequently qualified as traditional, popular, Russian. But we must also bear in mind that these traditions are comparatively young, by no means reaching back into the centuries, to the heart of Russian folklore.

What are these traditions?

The history of world culture shows that the best fruits of national creative art are the result of international exchange of cultural treasures, in the competition of the peoples.

Blank verse, the unrhymed iambic pentameter verse in which all the dramas of Shakespeare and other Elizabethans were written appeared in England in imitation of the ancient hexameter. In France, however, we have the Alexandrine verse consisting of six iambic feet with the caesura after the third—the metre of Corneille and Racine, Molière and Voltaire, the commonest metre employed in French lyrics, tragedies and epics. We also know that the sonnet was brought to England from Italy and that Shakespeare became an unexcelled master in this form of verse. At the end of the 18th century, the German poets Goethe, Schiller and Bürger, in search of a more democratic form of verse, took as an example the English ballad and, although they did not succeed in lending it that inimitable popular spirit which permeates this traditional English genre, they nevertheless created many beautiful poems. The first to introduce these to the Russian reader was Zhukovsky. Also, under the influence partly of English and partly of German ballads, he created a national Russian ballad. But in spite of the beauty of his *Svetlana*, this one swallow could not yet make the summer of this genre in Russian poetry.

It was Pushkin who really introduced the ballad into Russian poetry. He fought passionately, in every way possible, for the Russian ballad: putting our folk tales into verse, composing his "songs of the Western Slavs", (a dream of the all-Slav ballad) and his *Balda* close to the Ukrainian and Polish traditions or his unfinished story about the peasant who killed the bear princess. In the Russian fairy tales Pushkin reproduced the verse of *Svetlana*, in the ballad of *Bridegroom* he used the metre of Bürger's *Lenora*. But most important of all is that Pushkin succeeded (to a greater extent than the German poets) in imbuing this genre of poetry (hitherto reaching the highest perfection with the English poets) with something truly national, Russian, artless and childlike in the best sense of the word, something that had been preserved from ancient times, from the childhood of the nation, and capable of existing through the years until needed by the people of the new, just social system.

Pushkin himself regarded the treasures of art concentrated in his fairy tales and ballads, as instructions for future Russian poets. When Ershov published *The Little Hunchback Horse* in the *Readers' Library* for 1834, Pushkin looked upon this as a victory for the popular genre introduced by him (". . . now I can leave this type of composition.").

Perhaps Pushkin himself did not know the more profound meaning of his own searchings. They were the first foundation stones for the new, democratic Russian poetry, which strove to raise and present the entire life of the people. Pushkin's traditions were continued by Nekrasov in his popular ballad *Who Lives Well in Russia*, and reached the Soviet epoch partly through Alexander Blok's poetry (*The Twelve*).

Tvardovsky restored and strengthened these traditions in all their basic popular significance. Incidentally, the ties between Tvardovsky and Pushkin are deeper and broader than they seem at a first glance. To a delicate ear, the daring, clever *Onegin* notes ring in the lyric comments of *Vassili Terkin*. True poets, always know how to find the necessary and fitting teachers and companions, no matter in what corner of the world they may be hidden—time and space offer no obstacle.

But let us return to the *Roadside House*, Tvardovsky's latest poem. What is new in it as compared with Tvardovsky's former works?

In the first place, there is the departure from the pure ballad conventions of treating people and events which are so characteristic of *The Land of Muravia*. In the *Roadside*

House everything is more individualized—both the heroes and the subject.

Tvardovsky loves his Andrei and Anna from *The Roadside House* with as warm, fatherly love, as that which he had once conferred upon Vassili Terkin. Naturally, he wishes them long life and happiness. The opening chapter tells us that Andrei Sivtsov and Anna, and indeed the entire Sivtsov family, are alive and well (apart from Andrei's wounded leg) and will meet soon. However, the meeting itself is not described in the poem which, indeed, ends on a note that might easily permit us to conclude a more tragic ending.

Here is a summary of the simple plot and contents of the poem:

The action begins in Smolensk Region, in the native village of Andrei and Anna Sivtsov, already the parents of a large family. A June day. Andrei Sivtsov is hay-making. Happily he listens to the ring of the whetstone on the blunted scythe. He cannot get a verse learned in childhood out of his head: cut scythe, cut, as long as the dew lasts, when the dew is gone we shall be home. Whether this be a coincidence or that which we call foreboding, everything about him seems doubly dear on that day—his wife and the work in the fields and even his dinner table. However that may be, this was the hour in which the grim events took place with their far-reaching consequences: the blow was struck and war broke out.

The familiar happy world, the family circle, hearth and home, all ceased to be indubitable reality, inalienable solidity. Even the wise, didactic couplet from the textbook removed from its usual context had a different sound to it—it was bitter derision but at the same time clearly expressed hope in the possibility of the restoration and recovery of the peaceful life that had been torn to pieces. In the words of the poet, a strange and evil force came to their home and tore husband and wife apart. Andrei went to the front, Anna and the children—into German bondage.

The Sivtsov's native village is a long way behind the German lines. A long time has passed since "with a rattle of his gun, the soldier of a foreign land" entered the once happy home by the roadside. The terrible day when the first group of Red Army prisoners marched down the village street under a German guard is also long past. In these troubled times, Andrei, making his way out of enemy encirclement, meets his Anna once again. The outcome of this short and bitter meeting is a little boy, "called by his father's dear name" Andrei.

The boy is born in German bondage in East Prussia and in spite of everything survives. With this infant in her arms and the three older girls at her skirts, we meet Anna on the way home in the opening chapter. Meanwhile Andrei has returned to the burned-out village and while waiting for his family has begun to build a cottage with his own hands. We say goodbye to him (and also to the poem) at the moment when Sivtsov once more goes out to mow, so far, quite alone. The reader knows that happiness, that the desired meeting will come. But how many such unfortunate events took place without a happy ending!

Tvardovsky describes all this with faultless simplicity: clearly, accurately and tenderly. The poet is equally strong in his descriptive chapters (a picture of the season is conveyed in simple, effective words about the tender skin of the new potatoes "that scraped off against the side of the basket") and in conveying the stirrings of the soul, as for instance, Anna's feelings after her short, bitter-sweet meeting with her husband in enemy encirclement, when she recalls the last peaceful mowing and the words of the couplet sung by her husband, also familiar to her from childhood. Here, Tvardovsky has added one line to the refrain about the scythe "Forgive me, farewell, my dear one," and this third line, rhyming with the couplet, seems to come to us from another world, from a depth of human feeling previously not attained in the poem.

Because Tvardovsky is a realist, the measure of the verse, its rhythm is not the result of the caprice of a fleeting mood, but is vitally connected with the movement of events, with their very essence. In this he seems to be a pupil of Blok or his accidental follower. For Tvardovsky, as for Blok, the facts of the surrounding reality have a "united musical meaning."

The measure of the verse in the *Roadside House* is regular iambic tetrameter, alternating with an iambic trimeter ending in an unstressed syllable (rima feminina). This measure is less elastic and mobile than the classic Russian iambic tetrameter (beloved by Pushkin, Lermontov and Blok) with its peculiar play of male and female endings, frequently not in keeping with any strict rule. The measure of the *Roadside House* is more monotonous, and therefore, perhaps more tiring to the ear of the reader or listener. For this reason, it demands special talent on the part of the poet to liven it in every way possible, by the charming simplicity of style, clever didactics, sharp observance. There is no need to stress that Tvardovsky has succeeded brilliantly in this. As a result, the monotony of the rhythm is here accepted not as an incidental fault but as a musical-poetical feature characteristic of the singleness of aim and wonderful steadiness of spirit of the people.

In this measure, the poet tells the story of Anna's great love for Andrei, and even the thoughts which the imprisoned mother "thought but did not sing" as she nursed her infant, thoughts presented in the conventional form of a lyrical monologue apparently spoken by the baby itself. This is natural, this was the voice of all Russia, of the land of the Soviets.

In dissonance with this inspired voice, arousing pain and passion, is the "strange evil force" that has come from the outside. Here the measure of the verse changes. The male rhymes of the three-foot lines make the poem sterner, lacking all tenderness. This is the rhythm of the "foreign soldier", of the "foreign land". The same severe measure is used for the description of the scene in which the Sivtsov family is carried off into bondage in Germany, a manifestation of the same "evil force" that has broken into our lives.

However, this measure does not provide for the "bitter shame" which fills the scene in which the Russian prisoners are driven over Russian land by the Germans.

It goes without saying that without the necessary notional content the transition from one rhythm to another means very little in itself. But Tvardovsky well understands how to set off his rhythm. When the lines telling of the bitter meeting with the prisoners on their own desecrated soil are followed by the scene of this march in sharply changed rhythm, the ring of the lines is as terrible as the march of the approaching Germans in Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony with all its dull, stupid self-confidence and unbearably cruel puerility.

At the beginning of this article I stated that prose was the axis around which Tvardovsky's creative work revolved. The *Roadside House* revives this thought.

In this poem, the author has undoubtedly succeeded in creating a true song about the fate of our country. But in this song, not interrupting its tonality, the poet watches his heroes with the alertness of a prose writer. His portrait of Anna is drawn according to the traditions of the Russian "novel in verse", —it is a poetical sketch. But when he describes her feelings as she watches the Red Army prisoners march by, we feel the influence of Tolstoy and Chekhov. The whole of the fourth chapter still more resembles the chapter of a prose novel—the arrival of the artillery detachment, the enquiries about her husband, the fragmentary remarks about the war, the thoughts of the mother and soldier's wife. Thus with remarkable delicacy (resembling the psychological method of a prose work) the author presents the bewilderment of his heroine's thoughts and feelings in the scene with the war prisoners; her readiness to forgive her husband even if he were taken prisoner, and at the same time, her fear of asking the prisoners whether her husband had surrendered to the enemy. For perhaps, even dead, he would not forgive her this question. This is the true portrait of a Soviet woman. In all her bewilderment, this is the elevated manner of thinking which will guide her at the decisive hour.

Tvardovsky's portrait of the enemy is also taken from "prose", from conscious anti-romanticism. His Germans are by no means the villains of melodrama. His escort is only "in a devilish rage," does not "pity even himself." Neither is the one-armed man, who carefully counts his prisoners, "a picture of evil." Finally, the German landlord to whom Anna is sent is "neither good nor bad." It is true, he does not consider it necessary to feed her children, but there is no need "to teach a mother how to divide her own share."

This "non-malicious portrait" of the German invaders brings home to the reader with yet greater clarity the thought which Lamartine expressed so beautifully, although in those days he was still far from an understanding of the limits of human cruelty: "*Il y a quelque chose de plus cruel que la cruauté personnelle, c'est la cruauté froide d'un système faux.*" (There is something worse than personal cruelty—that is the cold cruelty of a false system.)

Never to forget this inhuman system which destroys human happiness—such is the call of Tvardovsky's latest poem. Love of his people, of humanity, fear for their fate—this is the inner impulse of all the work of this talented Soviet poet who has inherited the high ethical fervour of classic Russian literature.

NIKOLAI WILLIAM-WILMONT

VICTORS' MEMORANDUM

"Comrade battalion commander, can you tell us whether the war set us back or brought us closer to achieving everything we are fighting for—lasting peace and friendship among the nations?"

The question was put to the Soviet officer Petrenko by a soldier of his battalion in V. Ovechkin's story *With Greetings From the Front.*[1]

Wars, supreme trials in the life of a nation, are invariably followed by works of literature which strive to summarize the experience of the past and to voice the hopes of the nation for the future. Such works are of interest to contemporaries and influence the further course of literature only if the moral problems which the authors touch on and the stories of the characters in them have truthfully reflected the changes in the lives of the people and in their social consciousness.

Regardless of genre, these books are often autobiographical or, at any rate, acquaint the reader with the lives of real people whom the authors have known.

There are several books of this type which owe their origin to the Patriotic War of the Soviet people against fascism. One of the best is V. Ovechkin's *With Greetings From the Front.*

This tale has indeed captured the essence of certain important Soviet tendencies. Its philosophical and poetic content was born of reality, it still lives and will develop further.

Ovechkin chose to present his material in the form of a related narrative. Unlike most works of this genre, however, it owes its expressiveness not so much to peculiarities of language as to the content of its dialogue.

Though simple in construction, the tale easily encompasses the extensive summarizations to which the enquiring minds of its characters lead; the very simplicity of its structure in fact serves better for this purpose than would a more complex medium. Innocent of affectations, it is sincere and objective. The author does not intrude, but stands aside, faithfully recounting what he has seen and heard at the front and in the rear during the war.

[1] See *International Literature*, No. 12, 1945.

Consequently there is relatively little action in the story. It is not needed for the author has set himself other aims. In depicting officers and soldiers he deals with psychological types, with different manners of thought. He has tried to understand the things the Soviet people were thinking about, the conclusions which they drew while bearing the brunt of the struggle for the liberation of the world from fascism. His principal medium, therefore, is dialogue which at times passes over to prolonged monologue.

Ovechkin displays good taste in eschewing the customary subtleties. Witty phrases and smart repartee interest him little. His material speaks for itself, rings true and therefore presents life as it really was and really is. This method has proved very effective in his hands. The external simplicity of the story gives the reader the impression of great authenticity.

Space does not permit an analysis of the author's portraits one by one and we shall limit ourselves to certain features common to all of his characters, elements wherein they are closely related.

Traits of military professionalism and citizenship are well blended in the psychology, behaviour and characters of the people described by Ovechkin.

"Correctly express what the people feel" is a democratic principle formulated by Lenin and it was with this in mind that Ovechkin described the thoughts and behaviour of his chief characters, the Soviet officers Spivak and Petrenko. Their demands on life, on their men and themselves are prompted by this principle. They feel and believe that the finest quality of a man is his ability to understand and serve the interests of his people. Both Spivak and Petrenko discern this trait in the hundreds of people with whom they come into close contact at the front and in the hinterland.

"It has taken a hold on all of them," says Spivak describing his impressions shortly after his return to the front from convalescent leave. He means that the war has steeled the spirit of the people, has sharpened their political consciousness. Even where the Nazis had for years contaminated human souls they were unable to shake the Soviet people's belief in their Socialist ideals, to eradicate their patriotism. In the districts which the Germans temporarily occupied the people grew especially conscious of their dignity and their determination to wage a relentless, implacable struggle for the Soviet way of life was strengthened.

"Even a dozen Hitlers could not turn our people from the path on to which the Bolsheviks have led them," says Spivak. Wherever the Germans were driven from the stricken areas the people at once restored Soviet power, the collective farms and the Socialist way of life. Referring to this, Petrenko remarks that the people are not merely seeking to recreate the past. "Something new has begun," he insists, though himself as yet unable to define it. "The people have taken so resolutely to the job of scrubbing and cleaning away the muck left by the Nazis that only the blind could fail to see that this wave of intensified effort has introduced a new level in the ideological maturity of the people which is higher than pre-war."

The people can no longer tolerate half-measures, partial successes. They desire efficient administration and management, superior scientific and artistic endeavour. They are even more impatient with backwardness now than they were before the war. Many things grew very clear to them in the years when death was so near and life so dear.

The Soviet people anticipated imperialist aggression, took timely measures for defense and astonished the world by their selfless efforts. At the height of the fighting, when all the forces of the country were concentrated upon the struggle, the Soviet soldiers and officers nevertheless did not think of war alone, but also of the peace that was to follow and were accordingly preparing to resume their peaceful creative efforts after hostilities ceased.

Developing Spivak's idea, Petrenko declares: "Whether we live to see the new life after the war or not, we must have our say in it. Life is going to begin anew. When you enter your new homes, friends, don't forget to wipe your feet on the mat! Don't repeat the old mistakes! We'll be wanting to see a lot of beauty and happiness in the new life on liberated soil. If beauty is not to be had at once on the scorched soil then let it at least find expression in the relations between man and man and in the exploits of the people at work. We want nothing and nobody to interfere with our best and hardest workers developing to the full. We've shed so much blood on this soil and we demand a great deal from the future."

Ovechkin shows that these ideas of his heroes are by no means remote, unattainable ideals that exist only in dreams. The people in the factories, on the farms, and even in the trenches and at staff quarters laboured tirelessly for the sake of the present, which was war, and at the same time prepared themselves for grander and yet closer participation in the new and better future life of the country. The characters in *Greetings From the Front* are constantly striving to improve their work and by influencing their fellows to do the same, and this common effort at self-improvement hastens the realization of their ideals. The democratic consciousness of the Soviet people continued to crystalize even when their efforts were strained to the utmost in the hard times of war—the splendid efforts of a Socialist society, which was educating itself, still continued.

Spivak is a political worker, a commissar and one who is constantly striving to arm his subordinates against red tape and meaningless routine. He exhorts them to be truthful, comprehensible to the masses and to approach each person as an individual, as a human being.

Overhearing one of his new subordinates talking to the men, he remarks: "You've got the good scout's ability of looking briefly and seeing a lot. Your senses, I notice, have not been dulled. Talk to the men so that when the war is over they will remember what you say, not merely the rivers they crossed."

Spivak himself has the gift of spontaneously and unerringly capturing the essence of all

changes, of understanding the new reactions of the people, their behaviour and thoughts. Nothing less than amazing, for example, was the multitude of things that he perceived in a liberated village during the few days' leave.

Petrenko's principal feature is his constant effort and his unflagging ability to subordinate all personal interests to duty in decisive moments.

The word "subordinate" is perhaps unsuitable to describe the workings of his mind when he is faced with a responsible and difficult task. The mere ability to subordinate everything to duty for the sake of achieving an aim which he knows to be just, is in itself a superlative quality attesting to great spiritual strength. Petrenko, however, is by nature, a man of clear-cut and rich individuality who is able to identify the interests of his people with his own. He submerges himself completely, in the common effort but he is by no means effaced. At one with the people, his heart and mind are enriched by their life to which he, in turn, contributes fresh values, by devoting all his ability, experience and energy to the service of society.

Petrenko very probably is one of Ovechkin's most successful portraits. An understanding of Petrenko is indeed the key to an understanding of the Soviet State and Soviet society.

The war required a vast army of seasoned regulars, an army far, far larger than the Soviet army of peacetime. Such an army was created in the holocaust of war and in an incredibly short time. How was this miracle accomplished? Where had the Soviet Government concealed those hundreds of thousands of model officers who so effectually thrashed their German counterparts trained for decades in the traditions of the Prussian military caste? This "riddle" was never unravelled by our enemies and has in fact remained something of an enigma to many of our friends abroad.

Presenting such a character as Petrenko, Ovechkin is disclosing the social and moral sources of the Soviet Union's armed might.

Petrenko is an austere and exacting officer. His subordinates know this well and respect him for it. They are aware that his meticulous demands make for effective fighting, that they will be able to deal telling blows to the enemy and yet preserve the lives of hundreds of Soviet soldiers in action. It is for this and this alone, in fact, that Petrenko attributes such importance to discipline. Though no professional officer in any army could be more strict or even pedantic than he, Petrenko never forgets his responsibility to the people and his ties with the masses, represented at the front by the soldiers.

This idea is expressed in the following incident:

During a night march, two Red Army men in the column began a muttered conversation about the advantages of growing industrial crops.

"There was a lot of colianders on our farm," said one. "It's also called 'senshul oil.' And does it smell! Just like bedbugs! You need a gas mask during the threshing. . . ."

"Shut up!" interrupted the voice of the battalion commander who appeared in the dark out of nowhere. "You'll do your threshing at home."

"Yes, lieutenant," whispered the talkative soldier and said no more.

For some minutes the battalion advanced in complete silence. It was Petrenko himself who broke it.

"Not colianders, but corianders," he flung back over his shoulder, as he quickened his step to catch up with the head of the column. "Who was that talking about essential oils, you, Zavalishin? Cor-ianders. And not 'senshul oils', but es-sential oils, that's what it's called. Understand? Because those plants contain the oils which are essential, that is, necessary, in the perfumery industry. That's value, it's gold! And before the war a pood of rose oil cost not ten thousand rubles, but fifty-five thousand, if you want the exact figures. Don't straggle, there! Step lively, at the back! We'll stop for a smoke when we reach a gulley."

This is Petrenko. He knows that his men and he are destined not only to blow up bridges, to destroy houses and kill enemies, but also to raise plantations of those same coriander oil seeds the soldiers were talking about.

Spivak involuntarily smiled at the battalion commander's correction.

"Always the true agronomist! And he doesn't like inaccuracy anywhere!"

Petrenko is an agronomist and intensive agriculture is his speciality. He is an innovator, a thinker and a philosopher. Neither his professional interests nor individual qualities, developed in peacetime, have deserted him as an officer. One may say, however, that they have been sublimated, that they exist in another form; just as energy in the world of physics is transformed, but does not disappear.

How did this come about? Surely, the denial of a pursuit followed by inclination for many years must result in loss of vitality, and spirit?

The answer will be found in a certain feature of Soviet society not only familiar to the Soviet people, but generally acknowledged by conscientious foreign observers: the versatility of the individual in Soviet society.

Throughout its existence the Soviet Union has felt the pressure of reactionary forces from without, the Locarno and Munich advocates, the organizers of the *cordon sanitaire* and instigators of imperialist aggression. Try as they would, however, the enemies of the Soviet people could not interfere with their creative efforts. Production mounted at a rapid pace in the Soviet Union and the Socialist system proved able to withstand all attempts to deform it by economic and armed assault. Even under these difficult conditions the Soviet people were able to realize many of the advantages of Socialism. We shall mention only those which have a direct bearing on the present subject, which directly influenced the formation of the individual. The first of these is the new organization of labour.

Modern production calls for large contingents of workers skilled in certain operations which they perform to the exclusion of all

others. European and American publicists, philosophers and artists have described and depicted the mental degradation resulting from extreme technical division of labour.

Similar division of labour must of necessity be applied in Soviet industry where the conveyor system is so widely used. Measures have been taken, however, not only to give the workers excellent training in narrow specialties, but also to equip them with a more general education and broader technical knowledge, to prepare them for the transition to more skilled and varied work. The Soviet worker, therefore, does not feel like an automaton doomed endlessly to repeat the same motions. Every rung in the ladder of his development will furnish him with the means of improving his general education and technical knowledge.

This democratic system, i.e., a system serving the interests of the people, gives a specific vitality to the workers, enables them to acquire fresh knowledge and skill with comparative ease and quickly adjust their minds and hands to new activities.

A second most important feature of the Soviet system is the constant care lavished upon the development of the individual by the state and by society at large.

The chief role here devolves on social life; *social* because the people, directly or through their elected representatives, participate in the discussions, help reach and carry out decisions in all phases of administration, be it organization of labour in the factories, on the collective farms or weighty matters of state concerning the highest offices of government. Having a hand in the administration of his country and in the shaping of events which concern him, the Soviet citizen cannot help but feel responsible for his government. It is this which lends so ardent a quality to Soviet patriotism. It is the patriotism that has evolved from personal experience, from personal convictions which sustain the people at work and at war.

Both of these features—profound understanding and sympathy for the social and political strivings of their people and the ability to apply their energies where they will do most good—are reflected in the characters of Ovechkin's heroes.

The war compelled Petrenko completely to alter his activities and mode of life, to muster all energy and moral strength for armed struggle. Why was he able to do this so quickly and so thoroughly?

The test of war reveals the intrinsic nature of a person. It is often said that war changes people. This is only partly true. It would be more correct to say that war discloses those fundamental qualities of a man which under ordinary conditions might pass unperceived even by himself. The behaviour of a man in the war is largely determined by the things that were in him before, by the inner forces which he has brought with him to the struggle.

Ovechkin has shown that Soviet democracy which has taught his heroes to love their people, to revere peaceful creative labour for the common wealth, and to believe in the future and the triumph of peace on earth is the inexhaustible source of the moral strength which helped them to surmount all difficulties.

"Don't trust to appearances at the front," admonishes Ovechkin. "Tough though they may be, the battalion commanders, company commanders and non-coms are former steel workers, distillers, prospectors, geologists, agronomists, music teachers and architects. Each has made himself a soldier in the way he saw fit. One, for example, has decided simply to forget everything superfluous for the duration. His chest is covered with ribbons and his feet are as hard as the stones over which he has marched for thousands of kilometres. Hard boiled as he is, the inner man of such a soldier will reveal that he is still the same old architect, the builder dreaming of the gardens of Semiramis and the Socialist cities of the future."

Petrenko is just such a man. Having industriously educated himself to serve the people to the best of his ability in a profession most essential to them, he becomes a splendid army officer, who has preserved all his best pre-war qualities. He has also retained his affection for his old calling which was by no means chosen at random.

Petrenko is not an ordinary agronomist. His speciality is intensive agronomy and he has drawn profound political conclusions from the exercise of his profession under Soviet conditions. Knowing how many billions may be fed by the untapped resources of the soil, he is especially repelled by the imperialist hue and cry that the world is overcrowded. The farm on which he grew up once belonged to a landowner, a single family. This land was taken over by the collective farm—by three hundred families. It sufficed for all. The earth could yield harvests of thousands of poods. He was certain that this was so. Had he not been achieving this himself? Why, therefore, could it not be achieved everywhere?

The test of war, suffering, deprivations and personal losses has steeled the will of the Soviet people and strengthened their certainty in their right to happiness. They have emerged from the war more united and mightier in spirit than ever. Petrenko for this reason is well able to answer the question posed at the beginning of this article.

"Has the war set us back or advanced us in our aims, comrade battalion commander?" he was asked by a soldier. "Will we have lasting peace and friendship among the nations?"

"The ruination is terrible, of course," he replies. "We'll have to rebuild everything. There's no help for that. But do you realize what victory over the worst enemies of Socialism means? Over fascism? That's the victory of victories—triumph before the eyes of the world! Let's look at the ruins in a different light. The Germans have not set us back. We have more friends in the world today than ever before."

Petrenko revels in the fact that "we have already crossed the great divide, the anti-Soviet pit that separated us from the world." This is indeed representative of Soviet thought today. National exclusiveness is alien to Petrenko, proud though he is of his country and the Soviet society to which he belongs. His ideal of liberty and cooperation in crea-

tive endeavour, naturally, calls for the eradication of reactionary prejudices sowing discord and isolating the nations. The fact that millions of people abroad have at last learned the truth about the Soviet Union and have come to respect and sympathize with its aims is regarded by Petrenko as a great victory.

Ovechkin's book owes its success to a true expression of the feelings of the people. The reader of *With Greetings From the Front* is not only presented with good and true ideas but he makes acquaintance of good, true and clever people. Such characters as Petrenko and Spivak are not easily forgotten.

BORIS DYEREDZHIEV

NEW BOOKS

Georgi Saakadze. Engraving by G. Kravtsov

GEORGIAN CLASSIC IN RUSSIAN

Joseph Tbileli. *The Great Mouravi*. A poem, translated from the Georgian. *State Literary Publishing House*. Moscow. 83 pages.

The Great Mouravi by J. Tbileli is one of the greatest specimens of Georgian classical literature and the first realistic historical poem in Georgia.

Facts concerning the biography of the poet Tbileli are meagre. It is known that he was an eminent statesman and scientist as well as a man of letters. In 1660 he was at the head of the See of Tbilisi. He founded one of the largest libraries of Georgian literature. Tbileli died in 1688.

The Great Mouravi is the only literary work from the pen of Tbileli which has come down to us. It is believed to have been written between the years 1664-1675.

The Great Mouravi is a narrative poem about the tragic destiny of Georgi Saakadze, the great Georgian soldier who lived at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. The Georgia of those times was divided into petty feudal principalities. The nobles were engaged in incessant warfare among themselves, each aspiring to rise to power and glory over the dead body of his neighbour. Seeing their opportunity here, covetous foreign powers took advantage of the enmity among the georgian princes to invade the country. Saakadze was profoundly affected by the sufferings of his native land. He understood the necessity of creating a powerful centralized state capable of withstanding the onslaught of foreign invaders. But Saakadze's efforts were regarded with hostility by the feudal lords. The great statesman, strategist and fighter for the liberation and unification of Georgia imperiled the self-centered existence of the nobles, hence he was persecuted and betrayed; he was forced to flee from his native country to escape death at the hands of his assassins. He died far from his own land, in 1629.

Joseph Tbileli's poem is written in the form of a monologue, the confessions of its hero, Georgi Saakadze. The poet purposely turned to this form as if to emphasize his own impartiality and objectivity in allowing Saakadze to speak for himself. Through the logic of facts the hero convinces the reader of the nobleness of his mind and deeds.

Saakadze is a man of unswerving integrity. Notwithstanding exile and personal tragedy, he never loses confidence in the righteousness of the struggle for the unification of the Georgian people, although his dream remained unfulfilled during his lifetime. His farewell monologue to the Georgian people is moving in its sincerity and profound lyrical inspiration.

The poem has been capably translated from the Georgian into Russian by Georgi Tsagareli.

Ending for the novel The Great Mouravi *by G. Kravtsov*

A STORY ABOUT THE TAIGA

Nina Emelyanova. *In the Ussury Taiga. Soviet Writer* Publishing House. Moscow. 238 pages.

The author of this book is a woman geologist who worked several years at the Academy of Sciences Mountain and Taiga Station, in the heart of the vast Ussury forest.

The Ussury Region is a remote part of the country whose riches have not yet been sufficiently explored. The settlement of the district is comparatively recent, having begun approximately seventy or eighty years ago. Some of the original Russian settlers were still living in the taiga when the author arrived there.

These first settlers were impoverished Ukrainian peasants who came to the taiga from Kherson and Chernigov bringing their families many thousands of miles in oxen- and horse-drawn wagons. Eager for land, they came to places which required considerable labour and perseverance in order to clear them for farming. The settlers brought with them to the wilderness all the evils of the old life they had left behind. They had not been taught how to preserve the natural wealth at their disposal. Mercilessly they burned down the forests, exterminated the animals and destroyed the natural forest barriers against wind and water. The mountain rivers overflowed the treeless plains, washing away crops and orchards, thus destroying the labour of many years.

Years passed, and to the hills and plains of this Far Eastern district came new pioneers, Soviet people. The future of the Maritime Province became their concern. They sought new forms of economy which would enable them to adapt the natural surroundings to their needs without desolating the country.

A state preserve has now been established in the Ussury Taiga, which is developing into a well-equipped centre of research work. It will be a kind of gigantic forest laboratory.

Here a settlement with its own clubs, school, electric power station, library and museums will grow up. The pioneers laid the foundation of these first buildings. In the summer while carrying on their research work the scientists lived in tents.

The people of the taiga preserve are united by a common purpose and devotion to their work which is often difficult and dangerous.

This small group of explorers and remakers of the taiga is composed of geologists, botanists and zoologists, local peasants and hunters, who are setting up new forms of collective economy on the "difficult land." One reads with interest about the hunters, who are "changing their nature" in the preserve. No longer do they exterminate the beasts of the forest; they are on the contrary now preserving the four-legged and feathered inhabitants of the taiga.

Nina Emelyanova's book is written in the form of a diary, which gives an absorbing account of the events, both big and small, of life in the taiga preserve. She knows the secrets and history of the district as well as one knows one's own house.

The scientists are not isolated from the local inhabitants in their work. Thousands of people are learning to appreciate the idea of the rational transformation of their district. They have become interested in its future and their support helps the scientists in their work.

Despite the fact that the writer is a geologist, her diary contains many pages imbued with the poetry of nature, the gift for which is given only to those who truly love and feel its beauties.

In the Ussury Taiga was written by a woman with the sensitivity of an artist and the keenness of a scientist, who dreams of "the rational control of nature for the benefit of many generations to come."

PLAYS FOR THE YOUTH

Theatre of the Young Spectator, a collection of plays. *Art* Publishing House. Moscow-Leningrad. 223 pages.

The four plays comprising the booklet *Theatre of the Young Spectator* won prizes at the recently held competition for the best children's plays.

Stalin Prize Winners Sergei Mikhalkov and Samuil Marshak are popular writers whose poems have been favourites with several generations of Soviet children. In their dramatic works the writers have succeeded in preserving the charm of their poetic style and the invaluable gift of chatting simply and engagingly with their young readers about the serious events of the adult world.

Mikhalkov's three-act play *The Jolly Dream* is written in the form of a dramatic fairy tale the hero of which is a Soviet schoolboy Andryusha Popov. The other characters are the traditional personages from the commedia del'arte who appear to the boy in his dreams. They are familiar to him from his favourite Gozzi's *Love for Three Oranges*. Andryusha Popov finds himself in the fairy Kingdom of Cards, here a web of intrigues is woven and a struggle between the powers of light and darkness is waged.

Andryusha helps the decrepit old king banish the wicked ministers from the kingdom. He soon guesses what ails Prince Tartaglia: the poor boy has been pumped full of medicines and pills and bored to tears with dull story-telling. By making him indulge in hearty, side-splitting laughter and adventures, Andryusha soon has the prince cured. He puts an end to the intrigues of the designing Minister Brigella and the sorcerer Morgana and comes to the aid of the good Minister Pantalone.

Andryusha is a brave boy. In fairyland he is honest and resolute, just as he is in real life, at school among children of his own age.

Fantasy and present day reality are closely interwoven in the play. And so we see the fairy tale characters wearing wrist watches and speaking over the telephone.

The dramatized version of Marshak's fairy tale *The Cat's House* written in verse form is based on motifs of old Russian folk songs. It tells about a rich and conceited cat who owned a large house. When the "Cat's house" burns down, its mistress experiences the bitterness of poverty and homeless wandering. Eventually she finds shelter, but not with

her former rich friends "the goat, cock and swine," who now shun her, but with some poor kittens she had once turned from her door. In this artless fairy tale the author cleverly presents the problems of friendship and humanity and condemns selfishness and cruelty.

The verses of Marshak's play is close in its rhythmic form to the Russian folk song, its folk character is further emphasized by the buffoonery of the clowns in the introduction and epilogue. The poetic speech of the characters abounds in proverbs, facetious sayings and catchwords.

The name of the writer Vera Panova has become popular with Soviet readers this year. Her story *Fellow-Travellers*[1] enjoyed merited success. Panova's play *Young Girls* tells of the wartime life and work of two sisters in a small Urals town on the Kama River.

The plot is simple. Two young sisters, Inna and Toma, are left to their own devices. Their mother is dead and their father away at the front. They hear from him very seldom.

On the banks of the far-away Kama there is also a "front" and bitter struggle for victory is waged. The elder sister works as a railway dispatcher. She does her best to send as many trains as possible to the west. The younger sister is still attending school. In order to help the family of an old friend of her father's evacuated from besieged Leningrad, she earns money by secretly taking work home after school hours and sitting up nights to do it.

The playwright strives to reveal the inner workings of her heroines' minds and the many aspects of their personalities.

The patriotic enthusiasm of the two courageous girls is the logical outcome of their whole upbringing, home and school environment.

Panova's play lacks dynamic action. It consists of *Scenes From the Lives of My Acquaintances*, the subtitle of the play, linked together by the common fate of the heroes.

There are few characters in the play: Inna's friends at work, Toma's schoolmates, locomotive engineers and dispatchers at the depot and friends of the girls' father: all of them are portrayed with the affection and penetration into their inner world. This is one of the characteristic features of Panova's talent as a prose writer and playwright.

Son of the Regiment a dramatized version of Valentin Katayev's story of the same title[2] about the Patriotic War, has also been included in the collection.

COLLECTION OF POEMS BY A POLISH POET

Julian Tuwim. *Selected. Poems. State Literary Publishing House.* Moscow. 250 pages.

A collection of poems by the great contemporary Polish poet, Julian Tuwim, (translated from the Polish) has been published by the *State Literary Publishing House.*

It was no easy task the compilers imposed upon themselves in their eagerness to introduce the reader to the verses of Tuwim. In this small book they attempt to trace the complex creative development of the poet over a period of twenty-five years, including verses from various collections published at different times in Poland. A volume of this type, naturally, can offer at best only an introduction to the poet and his works.

Julian Tuwim made his debut in Polish literature more than a quarter of a century ago. In 1918 the young poet published his first volume of verse, *I Warn God.* In realistic tones the poet first raises his voice in passionate accusation of post-Versailles Poland which has betrayed the hopes of the tormented Polish people.

Julian Tuwim soon felt the bitterness of solitary struggle. A seeker of new paths in poetry, he was surrounded by a provincial self-centred artistic set, "a backwoods of snobs, of apes mimicking foreigners."

The influence of this environment at times was reflected in his own work. He fell victim to the moods of decadence dominating in Polish poetry at that time.

The poet "escaped from life into the four walls of his verse" to wander in the "jungle" of words, which had become to him "wine and honey, meat and daily bread." He retired into his narrow theme of solitude and yearnings, to "pure art" and abstract versifying.

Vacillations between the tranquillity and comfort of the poet's own little ivory tower and his dream of a "world-wide draught," of a "tempestuous social life" determined the sharp contrasts of Tuwim's-work of various periods. This is especially felt in such verse cycles as *Dancing Socrates, Seventh Autumn, A World in Blood, A Fair of Rhymes* and others.

Vladimir Mayakovsky understood the tragedy of the Polish poet. "Tuwim," he wrote in one of his letters from Warsaw, "is apparently very capable but restless and anxious, lest he be misunderstood. "He has written militant works in past and is eager to write them now, but official Polish taste evidently has him well in hand."

Tuwim paid tribute to the "official taste" of which Mayakovsky spoke. But at the same time he keenly felt how "uncertain was his well-being and liberty" and again and again he rebelled against legitimate opinion and morals. He even went so far as to direct his attacks at the reaction reigning at that time in Poland.

In one of his poems *To the Man in the Street* written at the period of Polish militarism's preparation for an attack against the Soviet Union, Tuwim calls on to the people not to trust the false promises of the war instigators.

A turning point in the poet's career and a genuine "rebirth" came with the September catastrophe of 1939 when the Hitlerite hordes attacked Poland and Tuwim was forced to abandon his native country.

In the years of the war Julian Tuwim's voice was again heard in Poland. His verses had now become those of a poet-patriot and fighter, calling the people to struggle for a new, free Poland. The poet plunged ardently in to tempestuous social activity. He appeared in the press and at public meetings, appeal

[1] See *Soviet Literature*, Nos. 6 and 8, 1946.
[2] See *International Literature* No. 11, 1945.

ing for the democratic collaboration and unity of the Polish people, denouncing the machinations of the Polish emigrè reactionaries.

It is to be regretted that very few of Tuwim's verses, written during his exile in the U.S.A. have been published in the collection. But what has been included (several chapters from his long poem *The Flowers of Poland*) bears witness to a new, prolific stage in the poet's creative work.

The Flowers of Poland is an ecstatic hymn to the Motherland which had passed through the tempest of cruel ordeals. It is a hymn to a free and democratic Poland, in which "the native speech would sound as eternal truth" and "right would be right" and "freedom would mean freedom."

The complex task of translating Julian Tuwim's selected poems into the Russian was undertaken by twenty-eight Soviet poets and translators.

TREASURES OF RUSSIAN ARCHITECTURE

Mikhail Ilyin. *Ryazan.* Treasures of Russian Architecture Series. *Academy of Architecture of the U.S.S.R. Publishing House.* Moscow. 109 pages. (31 illustrations.)

The city of Ryazan has existed 850 years. It did not have its own chronicler, as did other ancient Russian cities. However, excavations and research on extant monuments of the city's architecture have enabled scholars to trace the development of Ryazan and its cultural relations to the rest of ancient Russia.

The booklet by M. Ilyin, edited by Academician V. A. Vesnin, deals in a popular form with the history of the ancient city, the periods of its construction and architectural monuments which have been preserved.

A description and analysis of that superb monument of Russian architecture, the Cathedral of the Assumption, built in the 17th century by the great Moscow architect, the serf Jacov Bukhvostov, forms the central theme of the book.

Bukhvostov lent originality to the traditional forms of Russian ecclesiastical architecture and created rich variety in the ornamentation of his cathedral—white stone window frames of various designs, cornices and the slender columns. The gilded iconostatis is in the same ornate style; its carvings include vines, with clusters of grapes, pomegranates, and pineapples, all so exotic for Russia.

Jacov Bukhvostov worked six years in Ryazan. During this period he built several other churches and made his influence on local architects.

Beginning with 1782, Ryazan began to build according to a new plan. In his brochure the author analyzes in detail the planning of the new Ryazan and describes the civil buildings at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, dwelling on the relation of their classic style to that of Moscow's.

Ryazan, both in its period of feudal isolation as well as during its existence as part of the unified and powerful Russian state, was close in architecture and the decorative arts to its great neighbour, Moscow.

Ilyin's book, written in a vivid and attractive style, will help the reader to familiarize himself with the history and architecture of this ancient Russian museum city. The illustrations give one an idea of the charm of Ryazan's architecture.

NEW COLLECTION OF EHRENBURG'S ESSAYS

Ilya Ehrenburg. *The Roads of Europe. Pravda* Publishing House. Moscow. 79 pages.

A new booklet by Ilya Ehrenburg has recently been published as a supplement to the magazine *Ogonek*, in a cheap library edition of 100,000.

It is a collection of essays covering the author's travels to the Balkans and Central Europe—Rumania, Bulgaria, Jugoslavia, Albania and Czechoslovakia.

Ehrenburg's journalistic pen has won him wide popularity all over the world. The wrathful and passionate voice of the tireless fighter against fascism which resounded in the works of Ehrenburg during the war, continues with the same force to unmask the overt and covert defenders of reaction, who are doing their utmost to deprive humanity of the peace won at such a heavy price.

In his book Ehrenburg tells how the disastrous effects of fascism are being eliminated in those countries that have freed themselves from its yoke and are now creating up a democratic way of life in a democratic state.

"Rumania shocks the visitor with its contrasts—flamboyant Bucharest and the nearby coalfields of Ziu where the miners live in

Oleg Palace in Ryazan. The side facade

caves like animals." The people who are now lifting the country out of the swamp into which its former rulers plunged it are faced with a difficult task.

"In a certain French book," writes Ehrenburg, "I read that Rumanians are extraordinarily lazy . . . the author probably met only Bucharest fops with their Levantine habits . . . as for the Rumanian workers, they know what it means to work by the sweat of their brow. Now they are working even harder than ever before, they trust their leaders and are eager to help deliver the country from its plight."

The impoverished Rumanian peasants have received land from the democratic government. "Now we shall live," one peasant woman said confidently to the author. The land reforms, so warmly welcomed by the working people, are not to everyone's liking. There are still people in Rumania who have not lost hope of bringing back the old order, of turning back the wheel of history.

"I spoke to a Rumanian landowner," writes Ehrenburg. "When the conversation turned to the question of land reforms he said: 'That matter hasn't been settled yet.' I asked him why he thought so and he replied: 'You've heard about the atomic bomb, I presume?' He was convinced that the splitting of the atom would hinder the splitting of his estate." Those people who are working unselfishly to rebuild their country, the honest Rumanian democrats, are meeting with the stubborn resistance of their former rulers whom history has ruthlessly thrown overboard.

"Who supports the opposition?" asks the author. "Landowners, resentful of the agrarian reforms, speculators, discontented with the policy of stable prices, government officials who grew rich in the years of legalized bribery . . . yesterday's fascists now calling themselves 'democrats'.

"There are not many of these people, but they write a great deal, speak in public, and appeal to their friends abroad."

The war performed many miracles: Rumania, under the leadership of the fascists, touched bottom, now she has come to the surface again. The Soviet people came to her aid. Every Rumanian patriot is now a sincere friend of his neighbour in the east.

For many centuries the people of Bulgaria were oppressed by Byzantium, then by the Turks, and later by German and their own native fascists. The soul of the Bulgarian people was "a river that disappeared into the ground." On September 9th, 1944, Soviet arms victoriously ushered in a new era for the Bulgarian people. The people were able to breathe freely. "Once more the river came to the surface."

"In Bulgaria the land is poor," writes Ehrenburg. "There are few large cities here, few luxurious fields and rich stocks of corn; but there is plenty of the right spirit. I have seen Bulgarian partisans in Dupnitsa and in Kolofere and in Rodopy. I shall not repeat their stories; we live in times when heroism no longer astounds. The fascists paid rewards for every partisan murdered. Here are the sums paid out in blood money—in 1942—600,000 levs, in 1943—4 million levs, in 1944—87 million levs.

"Life in Bulgaria is not easy today. Too many cities and factories have been destroyed. But the people in the country are working selflessly. The Patriotic Front is building a new democratic state."

"In some countries," writes the author, "it is rightly said that political intrigues 'smell of oil'." In Bulgaria it may be said that the activities of certain politicians 'smell of tobacco'."

The State Tobacco Monopoly was welcomed by the peasants from whom exporters formerly bought up tobacco for a song. But the exporters themselves are of another opinion. Of another opinion likewise are the Greek fascists and their newspapers, which demand that Bulgaria be deprived of Rodopy (the southern part of the country where the best tobacco is grown) for the "protection of the civilization of antiquity."

Bulgaria is a country of ancient culture. Now that they have freedom of speech and action the better part of the intelligentsia, those who are intimately bound up with the people, have turned to creative work. "This is felt more strongly when one is travelling through the country," writes Ehrenburg, "than it is in Sofia." "All these poets and statesmen, musicians and scientists, come from the peasantry. Here they show you the cottages where they played in their childhood. . . Now, too, there are children studying in village schools who in a quarter of a century will bring glory to Bulgaria."

For Jugoslavia the war was a second birth. Much has been written in many languages about the heroism of Jugoslavia and all these stories are splendid.

"There were brave partisans in other countries," writes Ehrenburg, "but the epic of Jugoslavia is an exception. What took place there was not the struggle of individual partisan detachments. This was an uprising of the people. All the people of Jugoslavia are starting new ways of life. In a short period they have created a just and strong state, laws, schools, administrative bodies, publishing houses. A second war is being waged against ruin and hunger."

"Enthusiasm is more characteristic of the Jugoslavian people than accuracy, and in the past their victories were gained more by heroism than good organization. But now the partisans of yesterday are building, calculating and competing, they want to keep up with the times."

During his travels through the country, Ehrenburg visited zone "B", part of former Italian territory populated by Slovenes and Croatians. He saw Slovene peasants who at last attained the right to speak their native tongue, he saw Italians working side by side with Slovenes to rehabilitate the business life of Fiume and other cities.

"There is much arguing going on nowadays about the ethnical character of Trieste," writes Ehrenburg. "I don't know whether fascists may be regarded as an ethnical conception but in Trieste at present there are a great many of them, both overt and covert. They not only reside in zone "A" but engage unmolested in journalism. Sometimes the Trieste fascists pass from word to action, to provocations and political assassinations."

"I am not a diplomat," says Ehrenburg summing up his observations, "and I shall not speak of frontiers, let others solve that question. But I have lived through two world wars and seen too much blood and ashes not to be able to say, after visiting zone 'B' and reading newspapers in zone 'A': brotherhood is brotherhood, and provocation is provocation."

A LEAP INTO THE FUTURE

Alexander Kazantsev. *An Arctic Bridge.* *Young Guard* Publishing House. Moscow. 413 pages.

"The engineering project for a floating tunnel exists in fact. I made it sometime ago, believing I would build a bridge across the North Pole. But I just couldn't wait, I forestalled reality and together with the characters of my novel started to build an Arctic bridge. With them I failed, invented, fought, loved. . . May the reader believe as I do, that some day we will go down together under the ice of the Arctic Ocean to a boldly conceived submarine dock." Thus starts the foreword of the new novel of fantasy by A. Kazantsev.

Scientific fantasy is a genre that is making progress in Soviet literature. Alexander Kazantsev is one of the most gifted workers in this genre. His well-known novel, *The Blazing Island* predicted the development of the science in splitting the atomic nucleus.

As in his other books the events in *An Arctic Bridge* take place in the near future. The author's aim is to portray the realistic possibilities of modern science. That is what makes this book so original and interesting.

The idea of a Polar tunnel comes to the mind of Andrei Kornev, the hero of the novel, during the war: he is on board a submarine chaser when he witnesses the loss of an American convoy carrying valuable equipment to the U.S.S.R. Kornev is dangerously wounded in a battle at sea and is brought to hospital where he develops his project. The construction of a floating tunnel from the Soviet Union to the U.S.A. becomes the goal of his life. In a few years he succeeds in starting the construction but technical defects cause floating docks to sink during a tempest and this interrupts the work for several years.

The technical cooperation of the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union makes Kornev's project plausible. The characters in the novel encounter serious hardships but successfully overcome all the difficulties imposed by nature.

Kazantsev skilfully built up an interesting plot. It keeps the reader in a constant state of suspense to the end.

The action is transferred from one part of the world into another (America, Japan, U.S.S.R.) and the novel acquaints the reader with the customs and peoples of different countries.

The major events in the novel start during World War II. Post-war construction calls for the unanimous support of the people of the Soviet Union of the projects of their scientists and engineers. The icy expanse of the Arctic in which Andrei and his friends were lost after the catastrophe in the submarine dock, the Moscow suburban forests where a woman engineer experiments with rocket trains for the tunnel, the Karabakh mountain republic where Kornev resumes his efforts on his project, Murmansk—the centre of the construction, and finally the streets of the reconstructed capital—are the scenes of the main events of the novel.

The scientific material skilfully woven into the story allows the reader to give play to his imagination. Together with the author he will have an exciting journey into the future when all scientific inventions will be used to benefit free mankind and when the human intellect and will power will be able to control the elements.

VALENTIN SEROV

Serov, who was born in 1865 and died in 1911, lived in one of the most strenuous periods in Russia's history. This epoch, which was full of profound social upheavals and contradictions, gave birth to an unstable atmosphere in both the philosophical outlook of society and the art of the period. At the end of the nineteenth century, there was a rapid rise and fall of many formal tendencies in the arts all of which were more or less far removed from realism, and sometimes, even hostile to it. Serov, a pupil and disciple of the classic painters of the Russian realist school not only preserved the purity of the fundamental principles of realism throughout this epoch, but also developed and enriched them, augmenting them with newer, and more trenchant expression. Serov courageously took certain features of contemporary art tendencies and, imbuing them with a new meaning, integrated them with his own realism. True, the painter was not always equally successful in his attempts to absorb non-realist methods. But even when it seemed that Serov had surrendered to conventionality and formalism, he was really combatting them. The great painter emerged from this duel stronger, his realistic style greatly enriched.

Serov was the last great pre-revolutionary master of Russian painting. His solutions of many cardinal problems in painting still serve as creative inspiration for the masters of Soviet painting and drawing. Serov is today appreciated both as the creator of great art treasures and as one of the direct progenitors of Soviet art.

Valentin Serov, whose father, Alexander Serov, was a well-known composer and musical critic, moved in art circles from his early childhood. Scientists, actors and writers and more frequently painters and musicians, gathered in the Serovs' Petersburg home. With the family thus interested in art it is not surprising that Valentin, who felt the urge for artistic creation, "began to draw as early as he could remember," as one of his biographers writes. In 1874 Serov's mother sent a drawing by her nine-year-old son to Antokolsky, the sculptor, who highly praised the youngster's talents, and advised his parents to find him a teacher immediately. Serov began his first art lessons soon after this. His apprenticeship was a fortunate one; he went through a genuine school of painting under Ilya Repin and Pavel Chistyakov, the latter having been considered the best art teacher of the day.

Repin was never strictly speaking a pedagogue. He never followed any elaborate system of teaching, or transmitted his own varied art experiences to his pupils as did the masters of the Renaissance. His pupil was completely engrossed in his teacher's interests. He worked at the same model as the master, travelled and lived with him for months at a time and thus gradually grasped the principles of his method and style. Persistent and stubborn from boyhood, Serov in a comparatively short time mastered Repin's art principles. In 1880 Repin declared that he had nothing more to give Serov, who must now "polish himself" in the Academy of Arts.

Serov's apprenticeship with Repin was the commencement of his artistic development. From his teacher, he got his incomparable ability of seizing on the chief features in nature, his passion for the beauty of the material world, and his exacting demands on his craft.

In Chistyakov's atelier, however, Serov was compelled to modify his style. Repin's sweeping brush, his inspired emotion and external sketchiness did not harmonize with Chistyakov's demands of a scrupulous study of nature, of a systematic construction of its framework and painstaking inner moulding of its forms. For several years in the early eighties he devoted much time to pencil drawing both during the period of his academic studies and after he was graduated from the Academy of Arts. To Serov, drawing was not only an independent genre, in which he was destined to produce many masterpieces, but also the mainstay of his craft and a firm foundation for his style in painting.

The combination of the two influences—Repin's and Chistyakov's, added to Serov's own talents, produced in the middle eighties an original synthesis, which was regarded as a new departure in art. Serov's *Self-Portrait*, painted in 1885, gives a good idea of the maturity and originality of his drawing at that time. The serious artist stares searchingly out of the picture. Through the juvenile softness of his face, covered with curly down, you can see a tense will and integral character. Serov's portrait speaks of youth's throbbing vitality and an unsatiable desire to create. His *Self-Portrait* 1885, is based on the employment of fine contrasts—on a detailed colour-plastic treatment of the head and an outline sketch of his tunic; the soft play of light in the hair and the careful yet precise shading of the face. The result is a portrayal of a lively variety of emotional features combined with vivid psychological expression. The picture marks the line of demarcation between his earlier and more mature works. In the early eighties drawing was the dominating genre in Serov's work, but later he developed as a painter. His foreign travels in 1884 and, particularly, in 1887—his trips to München, Holland and Italy, were devoted

Peter the First at Work — *By V. Serov (1907)*

to attentive studies of Western classical painting. As was so natural in a young painter he was attracted by the old masters. Serov started copying Velasquez, and painted portraits, landscapes and subject compositions in the style of the old masters. These paintings are not in themselves very significant but they did undoubtedly enrich and develop Serov's technique and skill. In his portraits (1880-1885), of V. Repina, L. Mamontova, V. Derviz and others, we can clearly follow the direct influence of Repin: his colouring, volume, solidity and physiological precision all bear this out. During and after his trips abroad Serov's idea of colour composition underwent some changes. His work became more varicoloured and yet more tonal. While still preserving his severe drawing and colour strength, the artist now began to display a lighter, more sparkling touch in his paintings. A new, purely Serov, approach to colours arises—delicate, reserved and without Repin's sensual generosity. His stay in Venice during the spring of 1887 left its mark on him. Serov was enchanted with the scenery and the picture galleries of "the Queen of the Adriatic". In his letter to Olga Trubnikova, his future wife, he wrote: "My head is quite dizzy, but I am convinced that everything which the painters imagined and executed—everything, everything was done in a mood bordering on intoxication, and this is why they are so good, these masters of the 16th century Renaissance. They lived easily, without any care! I also want to be carefree, today they all paint morbid pictures, nothing pleasant, I want what is pleasant and will paint only pleasant pictures." And his brilliant sketches—his *St. Mark's Square* and the *Schiavone Embankment*, painted in Venice are masterly in the finesse of their colour gradation, and are fresh, light and airy. But his pictures painted abroad were only a prelude to the brilliant development which set in immediately on his return to Russia. He went straight from Italy, in 1887, to Abramtsevo—the Moscow estate of Mamontov, the most famous contemporary patron of the arts. There, he painted the portrait of Vera, Mamontov's daughter. This picture, known in Russian art as the *Girl With Peaches*, is one of the most perfect portraits painted by the new Russian school.

Russian art exhibitions had never before seen a portrait which combined simplicity and clarity of execution with such delicacy, refinement and lucidity. It is a portrait of a little girl in a red dress with a black bow on her breast, sitting at a huge table in a room full of air and sunshine, holding a peach in her hand. Its appeal is not in any external effects, but, like all Serov's best canvases, demands profound contemplation. The cold, grey-blue tones are emphasized by the red splash of the girl's dress and alternate with the complicated symphony of light which floods every inch of the canvas; all this helps create the atmosphere of freshness. Every detail in this portrait—the wonderfully modelled face with the beaming eyes and childish curve of the lips, the delicate colouring of the peaches scattered over the table, as fresh and attractive as the girl's face, and the fading garden which can be seen through the window—all exhale the poetry of youth and joie-de-vivre.

The twenty-two-year-old artist, who was still unacquainted with impressionist art, independently and originally solved the purely impressionist problem of the "plein-air" portrait, but solved it as a genuine realist, preserving to the full the integrity of the image and the unity of his methods. He does not proclaim the beauty of the fleeting moment which he has fortunately caught, but the refined sensual charm of a lasting objective condition, typical of youth.

His *Girl in Sunlight*, which he painted a year later (in 1888) was a further development of what he has achieved, in his *Girl With Peaches*. Serov considered this the best of all his many portraits.

Although this portrait took an entire summer to finish, it was composed in the main during the first few sittings, and retains the charm and freshness of an étude. Here, the delicate and calm painting of the *Girl With Peaches* is replaced by a vivid intensity of colour and warmth.

In his *Girl in Sunlight*, Serov found a final realistic solution to the problem of the alfresco portrait. In his *Girl With Peaches*, the forces of nature were still confined within the limits of an interior, penetrating and animating it, but in his *Girl in Sunlight*, the girl is painted against a background of meadow and trees. This picture shows clearly Serov's resemblance to and difference from the impressionists, for whom the "man in nature" motif had always been one of the principle subject types. His *Girl in Sunlight* displays many of the best qualities of the impressionist method: the freshness of the perception of nature, airiness, diversity of colours and tones. But the impressionists dissolved man in nature, while for them even nature itself was only an inicidental, more or less insignificant aspect. The impressionists' image is always purely subjective and devoid of any aspiration for synthetic generalities. Serov, however, has other aims in view. In his pictures, nature is but a background for man, and serves as an accompaniment for the major theme—which is expressed in the picture of the girl, and determined by the human mood. The same major force of youth can be felt in the luxuriant verdure of the leaves and grass, in the powerful growth of the tree and the bright refreshing air, as well as in the central figure of the picture. Further, Serov's palette is vivid, rich and intense—different in principle from the impressionist "washed out painting", as Emile Zola called it. His compositions are based upon a severe, precise pattern, which is complete and does not create the impression of an "accidently caught" fragment of nature.

In this same fruitful year of 1888, Serov painted two of his best canvases. The first of these—*Pond*—one of his few landscapes—greatly influenced the consequent development of Russian landscape painting. As compared with Isaac Levitan's famous nature studies, with their lyrical grief and inspired cordiality, Serov's *Pond* is tranquil and almost epic. The placid surface of the waters has frozen in majestic indifference,

Fanciful *(Alexander Pushkin). By V. Serov (1899)*

and, ruffled by lonely ripples, reflects the setting sun and the contours of the tree trunks. The clear-cut plastics of this landscape display the tangible forms of nature, with its volume and texture, "eternal beauty", and concrete reality.

His portrait of Madame Derviz with her child is on an entirely different plane. This portrait in light, sparkling tones, breathes the poetry of maternity and contentment with life.

In the winter of 1888, Serov exhibited several of his paintings including his *Girl With Peaches*, *Girl in Sunlight*, and the *Pond*, at the Eighth Periodic Exhibition in St. Petersburg. The practically unknown painter became the "star" of the exhibition, and took his place among the leading masters of Russian painting once and for all. In 1889, he married, and a period of maturity and persistent professional labour set in.

In the history of Serov's art the nineties are an intermediary period, in which he develops as a skilled psychological portrait painter, and the first signs of his future passion for decorative painting manifest themselves. During this period his colour system undergoes a profound change and, finally, towards the end of the decade his drawing is born anew as an independent genre. Serov's main searchings during the nineties were in the field of the psychological portrait. They began with colour painting and ended up with the drawing. In his portraits of Mazini and Tamanio, the famous actors, Serov first found his favourite method of character display with the help of gestures, the movement and deportment of his models. In his picture of Mazini, carelessly lifting the skirt of his jacket, with his powerful body ever so slightly bent, and his head bowed with just a shade of weariness—we see the finished portrait of a man accustomed to, and satisfied with, success. We see Tamanio, arrogantly rearing his head—and no more need be said. In his private life he also bears himself as though he were in front of the footlights—haughty and magnificent, though slightly affected. Serov's portraits of M. K. Olive (1895) with its animated movements of the hands, graceful turn of the body and coquettish smile, is acuter and more grotesque. In the portrait of M. R. Morozova (1897) the corpulent body, untidy, clumsy clothes, bloated face, depict the typical features of the Moscow lady. Thus we see Serov the psychologist and observer maturing and developing. During his lengthy and varied activities as a portrait painter, Serov always sought to depict mankind objectively. The artist on closely examining his sitters, and finding—what he considered the main points, always emphasized those features which were particularly characteristic of his model. If these features pleased Serov, his portrait was sincere and done with loving care. Such is the portrait of his friend, Levitan (1893)—pensive, delicate and dignified. Such also are the two portraits of L.A. Mamontova—both painted in 1894—which captivate you with their feminine charm. And, finally, such are his wonderful children's portraits—of Micky Morozov (1901) and of his own two children at the seaside (1899). But it was not for nothing that people used to say that "it was dangerous to have your portrait painted by Serov," for if the painter saw anything vulgar, cheap or false in his sitter—he became relentless and candid in his portrayal.

After his trip to the north of Russia together with Constantine Korovin, Serov painted several landscapes which formed the beginning of a cycle of such canvases continued up to the end of the nineties. His *October* (1895), *Woman in a Cart* (1896), *A Dull Day* (1897) *Winter* (1898)—pointed the way for the development of Russian landscape painting in the immediate future. In them he lauds the simple, modest beauty of his national scenery. The calm, leaden clouds, the cold brilliance of the waters, the yellowing autumn grass, the gloomy mists of the autumn day, the squalid snowbound hamlets—these are the favourite motifs of Serov's landscapes of the nineties. Their pale-grey, opal tones

show up the everyday life of his native land with delicate truth.

Firm, precise drawing was always the basis of the master's paintings. Graphic art, however, only became an independent genre in the last years of the 19th century. Serov began with some not very successful attempts at illustration, but soon took to graphic portraits, a field in which he was notably successful. His *Fanciful* (1899), a water-colour portrait of Pushkin, was the first of a series of graphic pictures. In this picture, Serov succeeded in portraying Pushkin's cardinal features—his creative inspiration and love of freedom. The poet is portrayed just as the modern reader of Pushkin's verse visualizes him.

This series of graphic pictures was crowned by his portrait of Glazunov, the composer, and of A. P. Nurok, the art critic, both done in 1899. The main feature of these portraits is Serov's search for psychological characteristics. In Nurok's portrait, the good-natured, steady expression in the half-closed eyes and the half-smile hidden in moustaches, lends the face an air of reflection. In this accurate likeness may be seen the entire character of an ironic, absent-minded dreamer, acute observer and melancholy sceptic.

But in Glazunov the painter discerned another type. The composer is depicted, just finishing his work, but eyes are calm, attentive and searching. Strength and confidence may be sensed in his large, full face, his slightly raised brows, the entire loose, but powerful figure of a great thinker who freely and serenely masters his talents, and life.

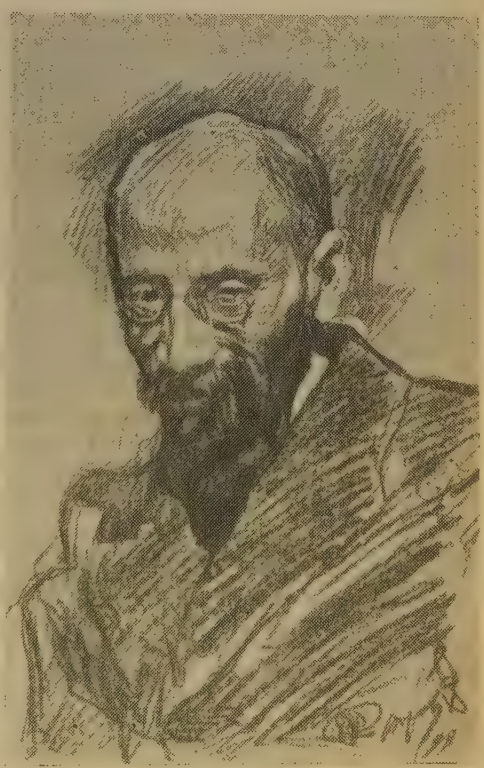
Both these portraits have in common one important feature. In each, the inner self of the sitter is expressed by his characteristic and unstudied pose and general expression.

From the beginning of the nineties until 1905, Serov was almost exclusively engaged in portrait painting. It was during these years that the character of the artist's work underwent a change. At times, the decorative portrait almost disappears, in favour of the monumental portrait which was new to him, and which developed mostly in 1905.

Of all Serov's psychological portraits of the beginning of the 20th century, that of S. M. Dragomirova (1900) is the most successful and typical. Of a most delicate texture based upon a multitude of variations of the dark brown scale, supplemented with a soft play of light reflexes, this portrait is equally ingenious in its exposé of the woman's inner self. There is something of the Chekhov touch in this portrait of a woman, whose all pervading torment of the soul remained hidden and untold.

Several of his psychological portraits are rather sketchy; such, for instance, is his *Ysaye* which, at first glance, appears to be unfinished. But Serov brilliantly caught and transmitted what was most important in the model. The heavy and awkward Ysaye has the fine sensitive hands of a true artist. His fat, pasty face reminds you of Balzac, and is replete with concentrated energy. Ysaye has surrendered himself so completely to his music that his outward ugliness is lost, and only one thing may be seen in this man—the mighty creative force of the great violinist. The series of monumental works done in the early years of the present century began with his pastel portrait of Levitan (1900). This is the first of the numerous series of portraits of artists, which Serov executed during the last eleven years of his life (from 1900 to 1911). His 1900 pastel like all these portraits is devoted not so much to the personality of the landscape painter, as to his art.

The monumental grotesque portrait of C. P. Pobedonostsev, the reactionary tsarist minister, is spiteful and wrathful in its astounding expressiveness. The ruthlessness of Serov's skill as an exposer is here manifested in its entirety. The portrait is executed precisely, even discreetly, and contains not a single vestige of caricatural exaggeration. Contemporaries affirm the wonderful likeness of the portrait to the original. It is this that gives the portrait the undeniable veracity and conviction of an historical document, the true significance of which can only then be fully comprehended when you begin to see how the genuine features of the notorious obscurantist make themselves felt through a mask of outward indifference. He is monstrous; his head, which has practically no neck worth mentioning, seems to be either stuck on to his shoulders, or growing out of his clothes. Pobedonostsev's face is repulsive with its pendant folds and revolting, protruding ears, the dry, despising grimace of his lips, the furrows of the bald forehead and, particularly, the dull venemous glance of those



Portrait of A. P. Nurok. By V. Serov (1899)

cold, menacing eyes. There is something inhuman about him, something which calls to mind some awful, fantastic bird of prey. You recall Blok's poem *Retribution* in which he wrote:

"And Pobedonostsev over Russia cast the shadow of his owl-like wings."

The social acuteness of Pobedonostsev's portrait brings us close to the epoch of the 1905 revolution. Serov acutely and nervously sensed the events of this period, sympathized profoundly with the insurgent people and was highly indignant at the bloody massacres of tsarism. In his letter to the painter Alexander Benois, Serov wrote, with bitter sarcasm; "The army, in suppressing the revolt, was equal to its task, and fired its guns at the crowds, houses, at everyone and everything . . . and then those brilliant massacres, and now searches, etc. etc.—everything just as it should be." After the massacre of the crowds in St. Petersburg, on January 9, 1905, Serov and Polenov resigned from the Academy of Arts, as they refused to submit to the authority of its President, the Grand Duke Vladimir—whose hands were red with the blood of the people. After 1905, Serov did not accept a single royal order and even refused to paint the portrait of the Tsar. Serov's angry, biting caricatures of the Tsar and his hirelings now appeared in satirical magazines, branding the massacres and the suppression of popular demonstrations ("Little soldiers, good fellows, where has your glory disappeared?" "The Wall and the wounded", "Nikolai II, trampling over the dead bodies, handing out medals to his troops for suppressing the rebellion").

His tempestuous sketch—*Bauman's Funeral* [1] is a particularly profound and artistically forceful reflection of the 1905 events.

This sketch contains much that is symbolically hyperbolic: in it, we see the enormous coffin lid and huge red banners, like flaming torches, and the whirlwind-like dynamics of the procession. The elements of symbolism are seen both in the integral unity of the crowd, in the solemn rhythm of the funeral march and in the stern tension of the red, black and white tones. But Serov's symbolism is far removed from abstractism. He creates a concrete image of the fury of a national movement, born of passionate belief in the mighty incipient forces of the people.

The 1905 epoch also gave Serov's portraiture new tendencies. In it there was a wave of romanticism, a striving to sing the praise of man, the power and beauty of his creative passions. This period of "heroic portraitism," is, in a way, the parallel of young Maxim Gorky's works, of *The Storm Petrel*, *The Song of the Falcon* and the poem *Man*. It is no accident that his new series of pictures opened in 1904 with the portrait of Gorky. At this period, Serov's art in general bore the stamp of the Renaissance, whose images inspired the artist with their spirit of the proud glorification of man.

Gorky's portrait is an involved composition. His enormous figure is shown with his head sharply turned to the right, his hand pressed to his heart, as though endeavouring to convince someone in an argument. His entire image is inspired with a passionate affirmation of independence and freedom, heroic will and energy which are full of vitality and the dynamic urge to action. The portrait of Maria Ermolova, the tragedienne, in effect, conveys the same esthetic message. This series is crowned by an excellent pencil-portrait of Fyodor Chaliapin, done in firm, elaborate lines. All the details of the textural peculiarities of Chaliapin's costume are clearly emphasized, the outlines of his dark silhouette are precisely stressed in strong contrast against the light background, and there is a delicate play of light and shade within the pattern. But all these devices, which Serov had employed before, serve only to emphasize the fundamental peculiarities of the drawing and its rhythm and composition. Chaliapin stands, with his huge body slightly bent, one hand pressed to the left lapel of his jacket, the other thrust carelessly in his trousers pocket, with his feet practically at right angles to each other. . . The singer has his head thrown proudly back, his nostrils distended and his brows slightly raised. He is about to sing, and the strength, passion and range of his song can be sensed in the picture.

Although the main theme of Serov's art during the epoch of 1905 was the joyful glorification of the creative forces of man, the artist had not lost his power of acute observation and crushing sarcasm. Moreover, from the height of those ideals to which Serov had climbed, he saw more clearly the "false notes" in the human character and ridiculed them on an almost monumental scale. In 1904-1905, he drew a long series of caricatures and cartoons. Undoubtedly, the most trenchant of them all was the portrait of Constantine Balmont, the fashionable poet of the early 20th century. The power of this portrait is in its satirical significance veiled by the mark of outward respectability. Only after a careful study does one realize that the artificial pose, disdainful mien, flighty carelessness of dress, and the faded rose in the buttonhole hide the empty essence of a talented poseur. Serov completes his scathing characterization of the author of *The Infinite Shores* with one cleverly thought-out detail: Balmont's collar is shown far too high, and tight which forces him to hold his head stiffly in the air. It recalls buskins worn by an esthete who is artificial to the very marrow of his bones.

The last six years of Serov's life and work (1906-1911) were the most complicated and contradictory in his career. By then, his fame had travelled all over Russia, and has resounded abroad—at the Paris exhibition, where he was awarded a Grand Prix, and the World Exhibition in Rome (1910), where a special hall was set aside for his canvases. As the leading portrait painter of the country, he was in constant demand and every one of his pictures found an immediate purchaser; Serov was highly valued, while numerous articles and mon-

[1] Nikolai Bauman was a revolutionary, assassinated in 1905 by agents of the Tsar's secret police. His funeral was the occasion for a powerful demonstration of protest.

ographs were written about him. At last, the much sought after good fortune and prosperity came his way. In one of his letters of this time, he says: "I am no worse off than Edward VII." One would assume that under these circumstances the famous painter could have led a tranquil and happy life. But strangely enough, during the last six years of his life Serov vacillated, worked under great tension, suffered disappointment and doubt in his ability. Never in his life had Serov worked as intensively as during these years when he created scores of paintings and drawings which were only completed after repeated alterations, demanding hard, painstaking work. "Oh, the work comes hard to me, there is a lot of labour in it—I simply cannot dash right into it," Serov wrote in 1910 to his friend, Ilya Ostroukhov, the well-known painter and collector. How can this, at first sight paradoxical disharmony between his outward successes and his inner dissatisfaction and uneasiness be explained?

The years between 1906 and 1911 were a period of fiercest tsarist reaction against all the progressive forces of the country. The tsarist government, after ruthlessly crushing the 1905 revolution, wished to prevent any possibility of the renewal of popular activity. These gloomy years in Russian history gave birth to a profound social crisis, which also left its mark on artistic life and led to a speedy dissemination of the "modern" style in Russian art which became the arbiter of fashion. This style was by no means an accidental episode: it was the logical manifestation of the epoch itself.

To try to keep up with the times and yet not float along the light current of modern art—this was Serov's creative dilemma. He once said to his pupils, reproaching one of them for the excessive attraction which the latest tendencies in art had for him: "Your work is modern—*l'art nouveau*. It is tedious and unpleasant. Would it not be better to paint so that what is good in the old can be seen through the new."

But if Serov was fully aware of what the "good old" things were, he was, in the last years of his life, persistently confronted with the insoluble question: which of the most diversified manifestations of the new art should he follow, and how could it harmonize with the old? None but Serov himself could answer this question, for, at the beginning of the 20th century he was practically the only great painter in Russia who had played an important part in the artistic life of the country and at the same time really followed the realistic traditions of Russian painting. This explains Serov's continual creative torture in the final period of his artistic activities. But he found the right way: under the conditions of *l'art nouveau*, he neither lost his sense of contemporaneity, nor his fidelity to his methods. In his works, the artist portrayed life as it really was—from its external settings, furniture and dress, up to and including its ideals, characters and idiosyncrasies, utilizing all the best and most important achievements of the new art, thus achieving a unity with the stylistic language of the time, without however, ceasing to be a realist.

During these years, Serov's psychological portraits, both paintings and drawings, developing simultaneously, are distinguished by an unprecedented acuteness and diversity of means of expression. In the genre of painting, this line commences with the unique portrait of Leonid Andreyev, the writer. His wan, pale face stands out in sharp contrast against the dark mass of loose clothes which falls about him in zig-zag folds, his enormous bow and luxuriant head of hair. His bright eyes, slightly slanting, his sharply diverging brows, the strained, uneven rhythm of the lines of his face—all reveal the unbalanced feverish, impetuous mood of this eternally rebellious writer.

Many of the painted portraits of this period are clearly grotesque, and his portrait of V. O. Hirshman (1911) is in this connection, particularly noteworthy. Slightly swaying backward, Hirshman is arrogantly feeling for small change in his vest pocket. Both figure and face of this parvenue are full of so much disdainful impudence and self-satisfaction (although, as always in Serov's pictures, veiled by his outward tact of expression) and at the same time, so much emptiness and worthlessness, that this portrait might serve as an artistic epigraph to the tale of a brutal, conceited, yet at the same time, flabby and cowardly Russian 20th-century bourgeois. In other grotesque portraits, Serov gives an animal touch to the likenesses of those of his sitters whom he dislikes.

The trend of his psychological pencil portraits during the last six years of his art developed along other lines. His pencil portraits are entirely devoted to positive characters of prominent Russian artists, with whom Serov himself felt a certain affinity of spirit. The first portrait of this series is that of Mikhail Vrubel. It is graphic in the narrowest sense of the word. The very vibration of this drawing lends Vrubel's likeness a very delicate and nervous reflexion. This portrait contains only two or three purely portrait strokes—the sufferingly arched brows, and the awful contrast in the expression of the eyes: one is madly penetrating, and the other—tiredly half-closed and moribund. The significance of this drawing lies in its intensive expression.

His portraits of the actors of the Art Theatre—Kachalov (1908) and Stanislavsky (1911)—which are close to this drawing both in the time of execution, and in style, differ from Vrubel's portrait by their depiction of clear purposefulness and great will power.

Stanislavsky's portrait, done in 1911, is the last of the Serov series of portraits of men of arts. This portrait generalizes the fundamental merits of this cycle. The energetically modelled face of the famous organizer of the Art Theatre is full of will and imbued with the strength of creative spirit. Although this portrait is a genuine likeness of his sitter, it nevertheless goes beyond the limits of the portrait of one definite person, and is a broad generalization and hymn to the triumph of the creative powers of mankind. The likeness is amazing in its major

resonance. This portrait proves that even during the dark years of reaction Serov was able to preserve his life confirming optimism and sacred belief in man.

His decorative line in portrait painting between 1906-1911 commences with his famous portrait of G. L. Hirshman (1907). This portrait has been interpreted in many different ways. It is said that its only value lies in the virtuosity with which the maestro has painted the luxurious boudoir of a society woman and the coquettish refinement of her figure. However, this conventional external layer and salon effect is but a facon de parler, the language of the epoch. A single glance at this woman's clever, serious face, which does not in any way resemble that of an empty-headed society woman, is sufficient for one to realize that this portrait has a "second" meaning. And this impression is augmented when you see Serov himself reflected in the mirror, gazing at the sitter intently and tensely, almost angrily, sharply frowning. This wonderful detail gives the key to the interpretation of the real idea behind the picture. It seems as though Serov wishes to convey the idea that: "These surroundings are beautiful and attractive; prize this beauty, but remember it is only really good when it clothes integral and profound characters and great human feelings." At first sight, the picture seems to have been executed lightly and quickly. But, as a matter of fact, the portrait was created after numerous preliminary studies, sketches and scores of sittings. Like his contemporary, Valery Bryusov, Serov could compare his muse to the ox, that works "unwillingy, when he doesn't work voluntarily." Serov, by putting his own portrait in the mirror stressed the long arduous toil which preceded the creation of this masterpiece.

Portrait of M. A. Morozov. By V. Serov (1902)

Nearly all the later decorative-stylistic portraits contain a hidden meaning. For instance, in the portrait of I. A. Morozov (1910) the realistically painted type of a prosperous Russian capitalist is depicted on a pure Matisse background. His portrait of Ida Rubinstein (1910) caused a tremendous sensation, here one can see the particularly sharp combination of contrasts. No doubt, this portrait is an experiment in the problems of modern art. Both the monotony of the colour planes and the principle underlying their contrast, and the deliberate deformation of the body, for the purpose of bringing relief into a two-dimensional representation, as well as the continuity, generalization and clarity of the drawing and, finally—a definite piquancy in the entire portrait—all this is the genuine *art moderne*. Nevertheless, the portrait was neither wholly modernistic nor wholly decorative in style. It does not sooth the eye but rather irritates and pricks it. The sharp angularity, the expression of forms the ghastly yellowish green of the ribbons force on the viewer the fact that he is looking at a picture which has only faint, external and none too tangible suggestions of art, "as comfortable as an armchair" (Matisse). And on examining Ida Rubinstein's face, thoughts arise which are far removed from those which arise when looking at pictures painted by modernists. Her face is tired, sorrowful, almost tragic.

The results of the evolution of Serov's conventional decorative portrait drawing are seen in two masterpieces in this genre. In 1909, he painted a portrait of Tamara Karsavina, the ballerina. This portrait is a fine example of how Serov blended his decorative art with his masterly skill to display the major features of the face and character by a few, meagre hints. He has delineated Karsavina's body and

dress in a delicate airy line, which develops in an uneven, impulsive rhythm, at a single stroke. The picture is obviously a pause between two pirouettes and the ballet dancer is once more about to fly "like a feather from the lips of Eolus." On the right hand side of the picture, the outline of her figure is given practically completely, but there is scarcely any contour to the left of the picture, towards which Karsavina's body is turned: it is here that movement is about to develop, and the lines of her body can be imagined already moving in space. Even her waving hair has preserved the potentiality of movement. Only her face—delicate, thoughtful and melancholy—the face of a lyrical ballet dancer—is tranquil.

Portrait of G. L. Hirshman. By V. Serov (1907)

Serov painted G. L. Hirshman's portrait quickly, but it can be truly said that he prepared himself all his life for it. In this portrait, the master has summed up all his long experience in graphic art, beginning from the lessons of Repin and Chistyakov and ending with the epoch of his fascination with neoclassicism.

The vivid beauty of Hirshman's portrait has been created by a system of light, veiled inner contrasts, blending in an organically integral single image. However, the classically perfect tranquillity of this portrait is by no means static. A bent-up rhythmic energy can be noticed in the oval composition, supported by the vivacity of her figure's smooth half turn and by the intricate undulation of its contours. The same contrast is contained in the juxtaposition of the surface of the falling folds of Hirschmann's dress with the smooth ivory of her face and neck. The tranquil, clear, almost stern beauty of her face is slightly animated by the melancholy expression of her eyes. The wish and reality, individual and typical features, sublime tranquillity and nervous spirituality are all blended in this drawing of the intricate image of the feminine ideal of modern times.

From modernistic conventionality to the realistic image—is the path which led Serov to historic painting. In the last years of his life he devoted himself almost exclusively to this genre.

An order for illustrations to a large edition of *Royal Hunting* gave Serov the impulse to engage in history. He drew the illustrations together with the "World of Art" group, of which he was a formal member for a short time. Like the other members of this group, in his first illustrations, (*Catherine II Riding to the Hunt*—1902, *Young Peter I Hunting With the Hounds*—1902, *Catherine II Riding Out*—1906, *Hunting with Borzoi Hounds*—1906 and many others)—Serov is mainly a retrospectivist, carefully reproducing in his pictures the dress, weapons, implements and other accessories of the epoch and painting them in the Roccoco spirit. True, as distinguished from the masters of the "World of Art" group, who only "admired" the idealized 18th century, Serov introduced a great deal of edge into his hunting parades. In one of his illustrations, he juxtaposes the luxury of the royal suite to the poverty of the beggars, in another—he frankly stresses and sarcastically elaborates the motif of scoffing mockery and brutal mischief. All these, however, are simply details included in a general, conventional picture.

In 1907, after a series of studies and sketches devoted to the epoch of Peter the Great, Serov painted his canvas *Peter the First at Work*, in which the clear realistic image has subordinated all the stylized circumlocution. The underlying principles of this picture have much in common with those of *Bauman's Funeral*. Here again, the procession is the leit-motif of the picture, with the same energetic rhythm and the same symbolic hyperbole. Serov's Peter is majestic and awful in his irrepressibility and resolution, grand and powerful, his personality overpowers his surroundings. His courtiers, who are hardly able to keep up with their tsar, are but as sorrowful caricatures, in comparison with him. In the landscape of the building site, seen behind the

figures of the procession, in the features of subdued nature, of the soil being transformed, one can sense the creative spirit of this epoch, and a profound belief in the victory of the great transformer of Russia. This was the truest and most trenchant image of the epoch of Peter the Great in the history of Russian art.

Immediately after his completion of *Peter I at Work*, Serov commenced a new cycle of historical compositions. It was conceived during his 1907 trip to Greece, whose scenery amazed Serov with its "great decorativeness, approaching the passionate," as he wrote to his wife. His series of sketches and studies was crowned by wonderful compositions *Rape of Europa* (1910). This picture is, evidently, based on these lines of Homer's Odysseus, where the sea is described as "now sparkling with the colour of wine, and now with a violet tint." The purple-grey sea, painted in wide decorative strokes, is the best part of this picture. The bull, and the statuette of Europa, executed in archaic style, are less expressive.

Serov's *Rape of Europa* differs principally from his masterpiece of historic composition—*Odysseus and Nausica* (1910) in which decoration recedes before the realistic incarnation of the bright spirit of ancient Iliad. This frieze-like canvas, sparkling with sunlight and the freshness of the sea breeze lends the same sensations as the reading of Homer's verse.

Serov's cycle of illustrations to Krylov's fables, which is often called his swan song may be included in the master's historical works. In his illustrations to Krylov's fables the great painter employed the methods of the artist-interpreter.

In these drawings the artist speaks the language of realistic symbolism, which is typical of the original. Serov's illustrations, however, are profounder and more significant than its literary prototype. The fabulist's mild sneer has become bitter sarcasm.

The thirty years separating us from the day of Serov's death is a great historical distance. The legacy of the artist has withstood the serious test of time, and, we can say without hesitation—has withstood it with honour. More than this, it is only in Soviet times that Serov's art has been truly appreciated and given the place it deserves. The drawings and paintings of Serov, along with the works of Repin, Surikov, Levitan and Vrubel, are treasured as the most perfect examples of Russian art.

Defying time and fashion, Serov carried the banner of the democratic humanism of Russian art through the epoch of reaction for the sake of the triumph of realism.

ALEXANDER KAMENSKY

The Old Lion and the Ass *(a fable by Krylov)*. *By V. Serov*

Anna Pavlova — *By V. Serov (1909)*

NEWS AND VIEWS

LITERATURE

IN MEMORY OF BLOK

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Alexander Blok was the occasion of a memorial evening sponsored by the Union of Soviet Writers which recently took place in the Large Hall of the Moscow Polytechnical Museum. Addressing a large audience of writers, students and intelligentsia, the poet Pavel Antokolsky, characterized Blok's life and work as the continuous striving of a poet, steadfast and sincere, towards lofty thought and feeling. In the early stages of his career Blok dabbled in symbolism and mysticism, but in his maturer years, after passing through a hard school of life and art, he was able to say in all truth: "With your whole body, your whole heart, your whole mind—hearken to the Revolution!"

He was the last scion of aristocratic poetry in Russian literature and after brilliantly contributing to the last pages of its history, was the first to bridge the gulf dividing it from the history of the new art.

Neither slander, censure, nor venemous attacks on the part of former friends could stem the momentum of a poet who had been drawn to the Revolution by the lofty thought of the patriot and the sincerity and conviction of a real artist.

George Blok, a cousin of the poet, gave the meeting some personal reminiscences portraying Alexander Blok both physically and morally as he knew him at different periods of his life. Speaking of the poet's appearance he said that the most striking thing about him was the immobility of his cold and handsome face. It was a face that was difficult to describe or draw—a sculptor's chisel alone could do justice to his features. But the impression of reticence produced by Blok was a misleading one. He was a man of lively temperament; a thoughtful observer. A very human figure emerged from the narrative of George Blok who gave an interesting picture of the poet's home life and the surroundings in which he grew up.

Kornei Chukovsky, the writer, told of his frequent meetings with Alexander Blok. The poet was one of the most highly educated of the Russian writers of his time. His study, said Chukovsky, was that of a scientist, it impressed you with its solid scholastic aspect. Erudition was in a way hereditary in the family. Both the grandfather and the father of the poet were professors; he himself had been educated as a philologist. There seemed to be some dissonance, however, between the lyrical image of the poet and the atmosphere of this great study which gave one the impression of having been built to last to the end of time.

"I have never told an untruth in my life," Blok said on one occasion, and these proud words characterized more aptly than any others could have done the mental set of the poet. A man of the greatest delicacy, said Chukovsky, he never dissembled; he was straight and unchanging in his affections and in his judgements. Chukovsky recalled certain outstanding episodes that were evidence of the poet's steadily increasing popularity.

Constantine Fedin, the writer, spoke of Maxim Gorky's great appreciation of Blok both as a poet and a man.

The soirée concluded with recitations of Blok's verses and songs by Soviet composers to the words of the poet.

DEATH OF HERBERT GEORGE WELLS

The death of H. G. Wells was marked by an article signed by Professor I. Zvavich in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*.

"The name of Wells," says Zvavich, "is familiar to every educated man and woman in the Old World and the New. In the Soviet Union Wells is known to millions of readers." The article goes on to a detailed narration of the life and work of the writer. Professor Zvavich speaks of Wells' writings as blending social problems with brilliant flights of fancy and elements of scientific prevision. The latter factor is vividly apparent in the *War of the Worlds*, a novel which appeared as long ago as 1898. "Turning over the leaves of this remarkable work today, it is hard to believe that it has been in existence for half a century and was written long before planes, tanks and radio had become factors of everyday life," wrote Zvavich.

Wells was one of the first British writers to visit Soviet Russia. But at that time Wells, though the author of daring fantasies, did not believe in the possibility of a new Socialist state being created on the soil of old Russia, bled white by the war. It is to Wells' credit that as time went on he recognized his error. When on his second visit to the U.S.S.R. in 1934 he saw unfolded before him the impressive picture of a state in the course of construction and later, in the years of World War II, when the Soviet land was standing up bravely to the main onslaught of the Hitler armies, and was retorting by crushing defeats, Wells said that he was a friend of the Russian people and glad of their achievements; glad, too, that his prophecy of 1920 had proved to be wrong.

"Herbert Wells, writer, scientist and public personality," the author says in conclusion, "was to the day of his death filled with anxiety for the destinies of mankind."

SOME RARE BOOKS

Among the one-and-a-half million books comprising the store of the State Public Historical Library at Moscow are forty-

five thousand rare volumes, all objects of the greatest interest to book-lovers. Among them are publications of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, and some belonging to the 19th and 20th centuries that have become bibliographical rarities. Here we can find *The Apostle*, the first Russian printed book published in 1564 by Ivan Fedorov, the Father of Russian printing; the Manifesto dated 1723, issued by Peter the Great, depriving the Tsarevich Alexei of the right of succession; the first Russian book of *Sailing Directions* for the Baltic Sea, published in 1723. Of supreme interest are papers on scientific subjects by the great Russian scholar, Mikhail Lomonosov (1711-1765) and several speeches he delivered at the meetings of the Academy of Sciences. Another curiosity is a treatise entitled: *A New and Concise Manner of Composing Russian Verses* published in the 18th century by the poet Vassili Trediakovsky, dated 1735. We see the first Russian edition of Karl Marx's *Capital* published seventy-four years ago; a complete set of the Russian revolutionary periodical *Kolokol*, published abroad by Alexander Hertzen and authentic copies of the official organ of the Paris Commune, which appeared from May 20 to 24th, 1871. Among the many interesting publications of the period of the French Revolution, are two volumes of decrees, protocols and material issued by the Paris Revolutionary Tribunal for the years 1792-94. Recently acquired treasures are *A Collection of the Newest Russian Songs* and *Complete Collection of Russian Proverbs and Sayings*, rare editions of Russian folklore published at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries.

A valuable addition in the shape of forty publications, mostly dramatic works from the middle of the 18th century, has been made to the collection of rare books preserved in the State Literary Museum in Moscow.

Students of literature cannot fail to be interested in the early Russian translations of Molière, Racine, Lessing—and especially in the first translation of Beaumarchais *Marriage of Figaro*, which appeared in 1787, and was produced in the same year at the Moscow Petrovsky Theatre. Another recently acquired book is a first edition of *Demofront*, a tragedy by Lomonosov (1752). The greater part of these volumes were issued by one Nikolai Novikov, an advanced Russian journalist and book publisher of the 18th century.

Before the last war the historical library in Kiev possessed about half a million volumes. This huge book repository was plundered, some of the books were carried off and some destroyed by the Hitlerites. Not very long ago seven railway wagons loaded with books that had been discovered in different parts of Germany arrived in Kiev. Among them are some three thousand publications of the 16th-18th centuries in the Slavonic language, which include a rare historical dictionary, dated 1790, and a geography book bearing the title of *A History of Travels Through All the Lands of the Globe* published in 1783. The latter book is mentioned in the biography of the famous Russian composer, Mikhail Glinka, who when a boy read and re-read it with absorbing interest.

Six thousand rare old volumes in the French language have also found their way back to their former resting place in the Kiev library, notably the works of Voltaire and a rare Amsterdam edition of 1726 of *Diplomatic Documents From the 12th to 18th Centuries.* Saved from the clutches of the Hitlerites these books have once more been placed at the disposal of Soviet scholars and historians.

FOUR-HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF BOOK PRINTING IN LITHUANIA

The year 1947 will mark the four-hundredth anniversary of the publication of a Lithuanian book called *Simple Words of Catechism*, by Martinas Mazvidas, the first printed book in northeastern Europe. This volume paved the way to the development of book printing in Sweden, Latvia and Esthonia. Extensive researches into this, the first Lithuanian book, are being prepared for publication by the Academy of Sciences of the Lithuanian Soviet Republic.

DESCENDANTS OF LEO TOLSTOY

The man who rises from the table to meet us is of middle height and bent with age; he has bushy eyebrows and a thick spreading beard. His whole figure vaguely reminds us of a familiar portrait. . . He is Sergei Tolstoy, the son of the great Russian writer Leo Tolstoy.

This summer despite his eighty-two years and a recent operation, he made the journey from Moscow to his father's estate of Yasnaya Polyana where his boyhood years were spent.

"The Germans," he said, "committed an act of sacrilege on a great monument of Russian culture. They burnt the school founded by my father, wrecked the hospital and tried to set fire to the house where Leo Tolstoy lived and worked. They even made a bonfire in his bedroom."

In a large room hung with portraits, eight people, seven of them men, are listening to the story told by the aged Sergei Tolstoy. They are all descendants of the great writer. The young man with the medal ribbons on his jacket fought his way forward with the troops of the Third Ukrainian Front and did his bit in the fighting for the liberation of Jugoslavia and in the battles for Hungary and Austria. He is Nikita—a great-grandson of Leo Tolstoy and at the time of writing a student in philology of the Moscow University. Like Oleg, Ilya and Alexander—three other of Tolstoy's great-grandsons, he was born after the writer's death, but Anna, Vladimir, Sergei and Ilya, the writer's grandchildren, have preserved a clear memory of their illustrious grandfather and of visits to the old home in Yasnaya Polyana. Anna is a pensioner; Vladimir, a specialist in bee-keeping; Sergei, a teacher of English; Ilya, a littérateur.

THE TVORCHESTVO

The publication of *Tvorchestvo*, temporarily interrupted by the war, has now been resumed. It is a Soviet periodical treating of art life in the Soviet Union.

The magazine is abundantly illustrated with reproductions of pictures of Soviet painters.

NEW FOREIGN DICTIONARIES

Several new editions are announced by the State Publishing House for Foreign and National Dictionaries.

Among them is a Hungarian-Russian dictionary, the first to be published in Russia. It contains some twenty thousand words.

The Turkish-Russian dictionary published in the U.S.S.R. fifteen years ago having become out-of-date, a second enlarged edition appeared in 1946, containing forty thousand words and collocations. The new publication reflects the changes that have taken place in the language and is indispensable in reading the latest Turkish literature.

A new Russian-Serbian dictionary containing ten thousand words has been published. Its predecessor was issued in pre-revolutionary Russia in the last century. It goes without saying, that it is all but obsolete and has attained to the dignity of a bibliographical rarity.

Second editions of a Russian-French, and a French-Russian dictionaries have been published, each containing some twenty thousand words and expressions in general use.

MUSIC

ALEXANDER ALEXANDROV

Alexander Alexandrov, a man who devoted his whole life to the work of adapting and disseminating Russian folk and Red Army songs, is dead. The melodies of his popular songs are serenely majestic and graceful. The consummation of Alexandrov's life work was the music to the National Anthem of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

His songs have their roots in Russian national melodies. The *Sacred War* which appeared in the very first days of the conflict gave expression to the heartfelt emotions of the people; wrath, scorn of the enemy, confidence in final victory. Small wonder that the song caught on and spread like wildfire throughout the country.

The son of a peasant of the village of Plakhino, Ryazan Gubernia, Alexandrov had a bent for music from childhood. He received his first instruction in a Petersburg Church Choir later joining Umberto Mazetti's class at the Moscow Conservatory. He graduated in two subjects—composition and singing, being awarded the Large Silver Medal for excellent results in both studies. From the year 1918, Alexandrov was a professor of the Moscow Conservatory, where he trained several generations of gifted musicians. He directed the choruses of a number of Moscow theatres and contributed to the development of children's choral ensembles.

In 1928, Alexandrov founded the Red Army Song and Dance Ensemble, with which his name was closely connected for the rest of his life. Under his guidance, the Ensemble grew into an outstanding musical body beloved by the Soviet people, and well known abroad.

A MUSICAL RADIO-ALMANAC

One of the latest novelties in Soviet broadcasting is a musical radio-almanac; an item aimed at bringing modern music within the range of the masses.

Its "opening" page, if the word can be used in this connection, is devoted to the music of the Soviet composer, Yuri Shaporin. Shaporin is the author of a number of monumental works, one of them, an oratorio, the *Legend of the Battle for the Russian Land*, was composed during the war. The radio-almanac acquaints listeners with Shaporin, the lyricist, author of vocal miniatures and songs. His songs written to the words of Alexander Blok hold a peculiar appeal, their clear-cut melodies making them easy to remember.

In Mussorgsky's opera, *Boris Godounov*, now revived at the Bolshoi Theatre, the title role is performed by Alexander Pirogov. Page two of the almanac introduces us to the art of this original singer. Pirogov was at the microphone in person and recounted his reminiscences in an animated and vivid manner. His childhood was spent on the banks of the River Oka. They were eleven brothers in the family, each one naturally gifted with an excellent voice. The best known of them all was the eldest, Grigory, the possessor of a powerful bass of exquisite quality. When a boy Alexander loved to go

The Red Army Song and Dance Ensemble

roaming far into the forests, or sailing in a boat down the river, singing for hours on end. His life on the stage began early and was a success from the first. He made his debut at the age of twenty-two in *Mazeppa*, with Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov, the composer conducting. Two years later he was accepted at the Bolshoi Theatre, where he has sung forty major parts. He prefers modern opera and is happiest when working on new characters. Suiting the action to the word, Pirogov sings Field-Marshal Kutuzov's aria from *War and Peace*, Sergei Prokofyev's new opera based on Tolstoy's novel of the same name.

Soviet listeners know *Alexander Nevsky*, the cantata written by Prokofyev during the war. The image of the Russian prince Alexander Nevsky who routed the Teuton knights on the ice of Lake Peipus in 1242, is portrayed with impressive force. It was extremely interesting to hear Prokofyev's work rendered by the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Westminster Choir. The next page of the almanac is devoted to this (recorded) broadcast. The performance was distinguished by powerful sonority, mastery of finish and deep penetration into the national spirit of the Cantata.

On page four of the Almanac, we again heard the international language of music . . . the songs of Norway. Dr. Hans Ustet, who recently made a short stay in Moscow, is a well-known physician, author of a number of scientific papers. But he came to the office of the Musical Radio Almanac as a singer. He is at one and the same time a medical practitioner and a connoisseur, collector and performer of Norwegian folk songs. He is the possessor of a fresh rich voice and considerable power of musical expression.

The premières of several Moscow theatres had a page all to themselves in the Almanac. Regisseur Fedor Kaverin tells radio listeners about *Eleven Strangers*, a new operetta by the young composer, Nikita Bogoslovsky. The heroes are the Soviet football players who went to England to uphold the honour of Soviet sportsmen on the field of a London stadium. One of the characters in the operetta is a football fan who manages to worm himself into the plane and actually follows the team to England. A number of duets and arias from the new production were given in the Almanac by the artists of the Moscow Theatre of Operetta.

The last page deals with the music of composer Boris Mokrousov, author of some popular modern songs. One of them, written to the words of Mikhail Isakovsky, was sung by Georgi Abramov.

MANAS

From generation to generation, from time immemorial, the Kirghiz people have handed down their poetic legends of Manas, the popular hero, Manas the mighty, the fearless, the unconquerable. . . From father to son the legends were repeated by the native bards, or the "manaschi", as they were called. Soviet folklore scholars are making systematic records of this epic; more than four hundred thousand lines of verse have already been written down.

This Kirghiz hero is the central figure in the new opera *Manas*. It is not the first time the authors, the Moscow composers, Vladimir Vlasov and Vladimir Ferey and the Kirghizian musician, Abdulas Maldybayev, have sought inspiration in the epic. *Ai-Churek*, an opera by the same composers was produced in 1939, at the Ten Days Festival of Kirghiz Art in Moscow: the subject of this opera was also borrowed from the legends centring around Manas.

A concert rendering of this new opera in the Large Hall of the Conservatory evoked great interest amongst music lovers. The collaboration of Moscow musicians with the Kirghiz composer has been productive of great results. *Manas* is a work of simple and yet refined harmony, of expressively rhythmic pattern, of an orchestration rich in contrasting tonal colouring.

"The authors of the new opera have shown themselves mature masters of art, skilfully and confidently commanding the wealth of national melodic material," says Aram Khachaturian, the composer. "There is no native folklore in the music of the opera but the national colour is vividly conveyed—the intonation being founded on the characteristic peculiarities of the native melody. The authors have wrought with deep insight into the spirit of Kirghiz national music."

THEATRE

BRANDENBURG GATES AT THE MOSCOW SOVIET THEATRE

Everyone knows Mikhail Svetlov as a lyrical poet. His short verses are packed with content, simple in structure and rhythm, melodious and moving. Their appeal lies in the depth and sincerity of the poet's message. Many of his poems written during the past two decades still retain their popularity. His *Grenada*, for example, is known to all; it is to be found in every school anthology in the land and has been set to music. Of the verses Svetlov wrote during the years he spent with the Red Army, *The Italian* is perhaps the one that has acquired the widest popularity.

Mikhail Svetlov's plays have also met with considerable success at the children's theatre. His *Fairy Tale* and *Twenty Years After* are especially popular with the young audiences. They are not really plays in the accepted sense of the word, but rather scenic narrations freely recounting episodes from the lives of his heroes, where dramatic dialogue is interspersed with lyrical verse, now addressed to the listeners by the poet and recited as such, now performed as though written by the heroes themselves, now woven into the texture of the play as songs.

The device resolved to by Mikhail Svetlov in his plays for children was one which gave him a large extent of freedom from factual authenticity. In *Fairy Tale*, for example, it was a child's dream that was shown on the stage; a dream of all the things that would happen to him if he joined an expedition; a real scientific expedition of grownups; while in *Twenty Years After* a friend of the poet calls to mind the days of his heroic youth reviving

Scene from the play Brandenburg Gates

memories of the young boys and girls who gave up their lives for the lofty ideas of the Revolution.

Brandenburg Gates, a play written by Svetlov, this time for adults, carries the action on ten years hence. Two men who fought in the war against German fascism meet again by chance in the year 1956, and recall events already dimmed by the mists of the past and shifted far into the background by countless new happenings. This justifies the episodic nature of the story as unfolded on the stage, the lyrical development of the theme and the lengthy interpolations in verse.

A composition of this kind necessarily predetermines a certain conventionality, blending as it does reality with fantasy. Yuri Zavadsky, Stalin Prize Winner, has presented it successfully on the stage of the Mossoviet Theatre. Its dominant theme is the natural simplicity of ordinary Soviet men and women under the acid test of war, their devotion to their ideas, and their heroic deeds which they accept as a matter of course.

"Whenever I read about the war and soldiers I used to say to myself: what moral grandeur! And I always wondered: did they really exist? How could they fight in those swamps? But we did exist!"

These words are spoken in Mikhail Svetlov's play by battalion commander Okhotin, as he lies dying on the field of battle. He wants his fellow citizens, men of future happy years, never for a moment to forget the swamps where the soldiers met their death, so that their eternal memory may purify and strengthen the hearts of men. There is neither dramatic conflict usually present on the stage, nor an intricately woven plot, and no broadly conceived characters. Most of the heroes are the second "egos" of the author. They are all poets or rather, there is contained in each of them a particle of Svetlov's being.

This is one of the shortcomings of Svetlov as dramatist; and one narrowing his possibilities. While on the other hand, it is in this conception that lies the singular attractiveness of his heroes who lead lives of tense emotionality, perceiving the grim reality of war through a prism of poetical fancy.

The stage scenery is light and conventional. The curtain shifts along the stage now to the right, now to the left appearing in this continuous movement to be carrying away with it the picture just viewed by the spectator and revealing a new one.

The outward aspect of the performance is created by the tenderly pensive landscapes of Andrei Goncharov. The stage is enveloped in the light bluish haze of a pale northern winter. One rather guesses at than sees the terrible swamps where Okhotin's friends and companions-in-arms bid a long farewell to life.

But landscapes alone could never create the atmosphere of poetry that is so potently sensed throughout the story. That is given by fresh and spontaneous performance of the cast. Amongst them a number of new players who are making their first bow to the public. In this play, *Brandenburg Gates*, there are many songs composed by I. Biryukov.

LYONUSHKA

The play *Lyonushka*, though written by Leonid Leonov in the thick of the war two years ago, only saw the footlights of a Moscow theatre this season. In the subtitle it is called "A People's Tragedy"—a name that defines the peculiarities of genre as well as its contents. The production is a complicated task offering considerable difficulties in the stag-

ing. *Lyonushka* is an attempt to create a modern tragedy of epic range depicting the sufferings and valour of a whole people.

The action is laid in the village of Kutasovo during the war. Together with the neighbouring lands the village undergoes all the horrors of a German invasion. The inhabitants go out into the forest to form a partisan column whose device is: Woe to Germany! The main theme of the story—involving the death of tank-crew man Temnikov, the lover of Lyonushka Mamayeva, the heroine, who is burnt alive in his tank fired by the enemy, is intertwined with the minor theme, the treachery of a former kulak, Stepan Drakin, who betrays the partisans and is brought to judgement before a people's tribunal. Despite the involved plot and the great number of events the play is an impressive monumental creation. The author has aimed at creating types rather than individual characters and has given us not mere episodes of the guerrilla movement, but an epic image free of hampering minute details of a people fighting against an enemy invasion. The language is colourful, abounding in metaphors taken from native folklore, the speech of the personages poetically lofty and interspersed with images borrowed from the popular epic.

The production at the Moscow Theatre of Drama is in the hands of Honoured Artist of the Republic, Pavel Tsetnerovich, and shows efficient direction and independent interpretation. The regisseur has endeavoured to present the performance in major tones, giving a picture of a people's youthful ardour overcoming the sufferings that have fallen to its lot.

In the first act only do the stage decorations of the artist Kozlinsky present the everyday setting of a modern Soviet village. In Acts II and III we have in the foreground a crowded dugout not yet completed and exposed to wind and bad weather, beyond which is a high hill crowned by a monumental tree, the soaring height of the summit of which is left to the spectator's imagination.

Difficult as was the task, the actors succeeding in finding the right tones for their impersonations; Lukyanov as Ilya Drakin, Gnyedochkin as Stepan Drakin and Knyazev as Potapych are some of the characters that deserve mention.

A FILM ABOUT A GEORGIAN WARRIOR-POET

We see on the screen the lofty vaults, exquisite ornaments and majestic halls of the palace of Vakhtang VI, King of Georgia in the 18th century. A tournament of poets is in progress in the gorgeous apartments—each of the competitors sings the beauty of the young Georgian princess. David Guramishvilli is proclaimed victor in the contest of skill.

David Guramishvilli lived and wrote in that dramatic period of Georgia's history when the country—a land of advanced culture but small and divided up into still smaller areas—had become the arena of the conflicting interests of foreign countries. A farsighted and progressive ruler, King Vakhtang VI wisely determined to further the development of his country in a friendly union with Russia. The Russian Emperor, Peter the Great, held out a helping hand to the Georgian people. On his way to Russia King Vakhtang receives the tidings of Peter's death. We see him waiting for an audience with Peter's successor, the Empress Anna Ioanovna, a weak-willed and insincere ruler strongly under the influence of the German camarilla at her court who looked down with open scorn on all things Russian.

Injured in the fighting with the Turks, Guramishvilli carries a message to King Vakhtang telling him of the dire plight of Georgia. His journey is beset with perils. He falls into captivity and with much difficulty effects an escape. In Russia he finds a faithful friend in Egor, a Russian Cossack. With the help of this staunch ally he makes his way to King Vakhtang and accompanies him to St. Petersburg. Deceived by the spurious promises of the Empress Anna, King Vakhtang sets off for the borders of his country. The poet remains in St. Petersburg. Here, his doubts are confirmed; there is nothing to hope for . . . he hastens to Vakhtang with the evil tidings. But death has overtaken Vakhtang on the way and he dies in the town of Astrakhan on the Volga. Not being able to return to his homeland, Guramishvilli enlists in the Russian

Prologue to the play Lyonushka

From the film David Guramishvilli

army, and takes part in Russia's wars against Turkey, Sweden and Prussia.

In the concluding scenes we see Guramishvilli, now an aged man, in the little Ukrainian village of Zubovka. The old warrior-poet sings the sorrows of Georgia. His treasured sabre, a family heirloom and a manuscript *Davitiani*—a collection of his lyrics—he sends as a farewell gift to his native land.

GORKY LIVES ON THE SCREEN

On the screen before us is a portrait of Maxim Gorky. What a noble modesty and love of man breathes in his words! "It is a great joy to know that you have not lived in vain; that you have been useful to people. I wish you, too, may experience this joy!"

This quotation forms the epigraph to the new documentary film about Maxim Gorky produced by regisseur Samuil Bubrik to the scenario of Lev Bakulin.

Page after page from the life history of the great writer passes before our eyes. The house where the childhood years of the future writer were passed still stands in the town of Nizhni-Novgorod, which now bears the name of Gorky. Gorky was only a boy when the hard circumstances of his home life forced him to "go into service." Here is the Volga—the greatest of Russian rivers. Gorky sailed these waters in a steamer and washed up the plates behind the buffet for two rubles a month. Books were the boy's only solace in that hard and joyless time.

"Books helped me to rise above the stagnant bogs where I would have sunk, flooded by meanness and stupidity," Gorky wrote later. "A small boy, a poor overworked little drudge, the butt of foolish profanities, I made a solemn promise to help people and serve them faithfully when I grew up."

Familiar as Russian people are with Gorky's biography the spectators cannot see unmoved the episodes recorded on the screen—the meeting between Gorky and Lenin in 1905, and the growing friendship between the two men. Equally strong was the friendship binding the writer with Joseph Stalin. Here come the shots of a newsreel showing Stalin and Gorky in Moscow on the tribune of the Red Square under the Kremlin walls. They are both smiling as they greet the columns marching across the square, columns of men and women of whom Gorky used to say: "My joy and my pride is the new Russian man, the builder of the new state."

The life of the new Russia was of intense interest to Gorky. On his return from Italy where he had gone at the advice of Lenin to recover his health, he set off on a journey to his old haunts. The Volga, the Caucasus, the Ukraine, the Crimea. . . The country which in the long-gone years the young writer had traversed on foot was changed beyond recognition. Gorky visits the "Giant" state farm, talks to the oil workers of Baku, watches the men busily at work in the shipyards, looks into the young faces of the soldiers, exchanges kindly banter with the children he meets on his way. Writer, publicist, fighter for the new culture—such we see Gorky on the screen.

ART

A PICTURE RE-BORN

A curious find was made in the year 1924, in the Siberian town of Nizhni Tagil. In a shed belonging to a factory two boards blackened by exposure on which indistinct traces of a painting could be discerned were accidentally discovered. Some of the older workers told us that these boards had been lying there neglected for years. The two halves were glued together, and after washing off the grime covering them and removing the later coatings of paint, overlaying (apparently since the 18th century), the lower board, there emerged before the astounded eyes of the restorers a *Madonna With Veil* painted by Rafael.

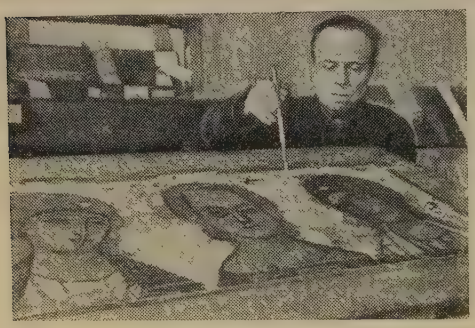
This was how the work of a great master was born into the world a second time.

The restoration of old pictures is no easy task. In Moscow there is a State Central Art Restoration Workshop, carrying on valuable work in this field. Pictures, ancient icons, precious pieces of embroidery are brought here from all parts of the country to be restored to their pristine splendour. Half-rotted boards and decaying canvases are substituted by new ones; dimmed lac-

quer regains its former transparency; the most searching examination will fail to reveal as much as a trace of old blemishes.

The Central Art Restoration Workshop was founded in the year 1918. Hundreds of precious works of art have been saved by the able efforts of the expert staff. Among the pictures "returned to life" are canvases of Jan Mostart (1474-1555), the Dutch master; of Palma Veccio (1490-1528) the Venetian painter, Jan Feit (1611-1666) of the Flemish school, and many others.

Soviet experts have discovered decorative frescos of ancient Russian masters of the 11th-13th centuries, paintings by Theophanus Greck in Novgorod, by Andrei Rublev at Vladimir and frescos from Cathedrals of Yaroslavl and the Moscow Kremlin. The works of the old icon painters of the 11th-



Ancient paintings being restored. I. Baranov at work

16th centuries who produced their pictures in Kiev, Moscow, Suzdal, Novgorod, and other seats of the ancient Russian culture have been brought back to life—things of beauty to the appreciative eye of the lover of art.

Before any restoration work is proceeded with the picture is subjected to all-round study and examination. The structure of the painting and the peculiar character of the master's brush strokes are examined with the help of microanalysis and microphotography, and if occasion calls for it the canvas is X-rayed.

Standing on an easel is a small portrait of Istomina, a Prima ballerina of Pushkin's time, to whose inimitable grace the poet devoted some inspired lines in the poem *Eugene Onegin*. The portrait is in good condition and in no need of restoration. But—curious to say, the Roentgen plate revealed the contours of a portrait of a man. What a task calling for consummate skill it will be to separate the layers of the pictures in such a way as to "set free" the hidden effigy without destroying the portrait of Istomina! To accomplish this feat, the surface of the picture will be handled by a special chemical solution which will soften the colours of the upper layer leaving untouched the picture underneath. The dissolved colours saturated with isinglass will be covered with tissue paper, pressed with a warm flat-iron and together with the paper transferred to a new canvas. After this the restorer, armed with a set of keen-edged surgical instruments will carefully clean the portrait of a man. The tissue paper will be washed off the dancer's portrait with water. Both portraits, duly varnished will be returned to their owner—the Theatrical Museum named after Bakhrushin.

Great work is under preparation in the restoration shop on the outside frescos of the Blagoveshchensk, Uspensk and Arkhangel cathedrals, in the Moscow Kremlin and the paintings in the Kirillovsk Cathedral in Kiev, the frescos of which belong to the brush of Vrubel.

IVAN EFIMOV, SCULPTOR

Animal painting has long been a popular genre in art. Some artists prefer hunting themes, the thrill of the struggle between man and beast; some have the tastes of the naturalist who studies the animal world either as a whole or some particular species of its inhabitants. Animal figures not unfrequently serve as subjects for sculptured knickknacks.

The Russian sculptor Ivan Efimov, who recently celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the launching of his career as an artist by a public exhibition at the Moscow House of the Architect, has a treatment peculiarly his own in animal sculpture.

He has remarkable keenness of vision, inexhaustible creative fancy, and excellent feeling for material.

The possessor of an original style, Efimov shows remarkable proficiency in handling the most varied materials, wood, stone, glass, bronze and porcelain; his manner of using them in different combinations and his quaint treatment lend them a cachet characteristically Efimov's own.

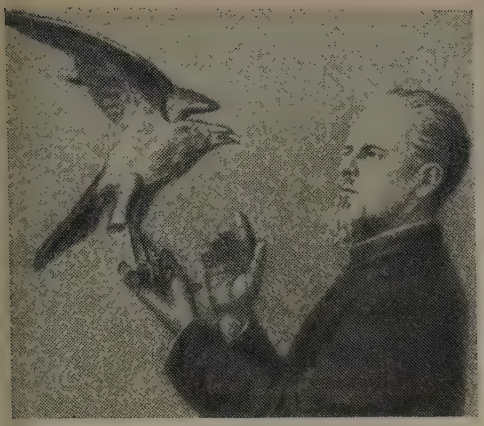
Efimov's original talent made itself felt from the first in his early works—the *Black Panther*, *Elephant*, *White Bear*, *Puma*. At that stage the artist tried his hand at china, porcelain, and terracotta. Somewhat later, in 1912, he created his porcelain *Lamb*, one of his best productions, a touching, engaging little creature with a large head and thin legs.

As time went on he executed a number of other sculptures in ceramics—a timidly graceful doe, a zebra, proud and rounded; a crafty marten, a playful *Cat With a Ball*, a penguin clumsy and pompous. In these, as in all his other animal studies, Efimov is preeminently the zoologist, endeavouring to reveal the characteristic traits of the animal's behaviour, nature and psychology.

Simultaneously with his first works in china and porcelain there appear his *Elk*, *Bison*, and *Lioness Couchant* carved in wood; a *Head of a Lioness* and *Satyr* in bronze and some other sculptures which are now mostly the property of the State Tretyakov Gallery.

In the late twenties Efimov did his first work in beaten copper. We have a whole series of his birds and fishes in this medium, delicately and daringly handled: *The Bound Falcon*, *A Cock*, *Flying Hawk*, *Ostrich*, *Dolphin*, *Turkey Cock*, etc.

He has a predilection for dolphins, pre-



Ivan Efimov with his Falcon

senting them in different mediums and different combinations. To convey the lightness and mobility of the dolphin, Efimov uses beaten copper and blown glass. The composition is calculated to make the dolphin appear to be rising above the glass globe and floating in the air. The globe is supported by four small fishes in bronze that seem to be making a plunge from the globe into deep waters.

One of his latest works in beaten copper is deserving of special mention. It is a sculpture of a giraffe over a yard high, splendidly conveying the animal's proportions, always startlingly unusual. The originality of the conception is apparent not so much in the figure of the animal as in the author's attempt to show a landscape motif in round sculpture. By the side of the animal Efimov has placed a pink plane tree with five drooping copper branches on the top. The tree is symbolic of the desert, the thematic connection with the animal being achieved by compositional means as well as through the tiny twig hanging out of the giraffe's mouth.

In quest of new devices for entrancing plastic and decorative effects Efimov has resorted to the open work form of sculpture. His *Bisons Fighting at Dawn* is a pierced bas-relief in bronze on a massive pedestal. The choice of medium was not left to chance, Efimov told us. Smelted bronze conveys the impression of power better, perhaps, than any other material. "I present my bisons," he continued, "not in three-dimension form, but in relief. The animals are better viewed in profile, than 'square in the face.'"

The essence of Efimov's creative method is essentially a striving to attain maximum expressiveness of the image with maximum economy of means. He comes nearest to his ideal in his pierced relief with forms which are sometimes massive and sometimes merely outlined in sheet copper or copper wire. For this treatment the sculptor must possess faultless insight and sense of form lest plastic relief becomes converted into two-dimension presentation.

Pierced sculpture, samples of which we have in *Hunting the Elk, Deer, Fishes, A Ram*, and several splendid samples of garden railings forms a separate class of decorative and ornamental work in Efimov's art.

Efimov has made successful use of figures of animals in designs for fountains in the Park of the Central House of the Red Army, in the square adjoining the Moscow-Volga port and in Sochi, the Caucasian health resort.

His artistic tastes are catholic. Early in his career we saw him figuring in exhibitions as a painter. He is also an excellent draughtsman and has more than once tried his hand at etching and lithography. He is invariably successful in his book illustrations, especially those he has done for juvenile literature.

He is furthermore known in the U.S.S.R. for his partiality to the puppet theatre and galanty show. He cuts out all the puppets himself and is regisseur and actor in one, staging fables by Krylov and not stopping at Shakespeare's tragedies. These pursuits go far to satisfy his thirst for invention and an interest in moving sculpture.

These, however, are minor interests; in the range of his sculptural themes we find, besides his favourite animal characters, human figures also. Among his early works is a terracotta bas-relief *Isidora Duncan Dancing*, and a portrait in china of the writer Andrei Bely. Never ceasing to regret that the art of monumental sculpture in porcelain had died with Lucas della Robbia, he strove to revive this genre in making an allegorical sculpture *Water* in the shape of a woman washing herself. He reverted to the human figure more than once in later work, designing monuments and memorial

The Dolphin. *A sculpture by I. Efimov*

tablets and such complex compositions as *Making a Road, Capture of a Commanding Height, A Bashkir Udarnik, Prospecting for Gold, May Day* and others.

MISCELLANEOUS

ALEXANDER BOGOMOLETS OBITUARY

Soviet science sustained a heavy loss with the death of Alexander Bogomolets, President of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences.

Alexander Bogomolets, scholar, pathophysiologist and prominent citizen was born in Kiev in 1881. He studied medicine at the Novorossiisk University, and it was there that his early achievements in the field of scientific research were attained. In 1909 he took his degree of Doctor of Medicine for a work on the structure and function of the renal glands in man. This determined the lines of his future scientific work in the field of humoral physiology.

His work in science was great and versatile. Besides his early works in endocrinology, he made fundamental researches into some aspects of metabolism, the nervous regulation of the vegetative functions of the organism, the pathophysiology of hypertension and blood transfusion. In 1928 Alexander Bogomolets founded the Institute for Blood Transfusion in Moscow with which he maintained continuous contact until the last days of his life. In 1930, he was elected President of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences.

Academician Bogomolets devoted the latter period of his activities to the study of the functions of the physiological system of the connective tissue. Disturbance of the functions of the connective tissue is, according to his theory, one of the main causes of premature old age and of many diseases of man. The antireticular cytotoxic serum developed by Bogomolets has been widely used in the treatment of various diseases, particularly in the years of World War II.

With Alexander Bogomolets intensive scientific work proceeded side by side with public and state activities. He was deputy to the Supreme Soviets of the U.S.S.R. and of the Ukrainian Republic. Besides leading the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences Alexander Bogomolets was member of the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., and headed a number of important institutions for scientific medical research.

THE TROITSK-SERGIEVSK MONASTERY

The Troitsk-Sergievsk Monastery is many centuries old. Its history is closely intertwined with the history of Moscow and the Russian state.

The Russian prince Dmitri Donskoy came here in 1380 before starting off on his march against the Tatars to receive the blessing of the monastery's founder—Sergei Radonezhsky. The Battle of Kulikovo Field ended in victory for Russian arms and was the beginning of the liberation of Russia from the Tatar yoke.

In the 17th century the monastery wrote a glorious page in the history of Russia, by a heroic sixteen months' defence against foreign invaders. The monastery was besieged by an iron ring of troops, thirty thousand strong. In those times the buildings were surrounded by a jagged stone wall with two tiers of niches sheltering the defenders of the fortress. Rising from the corners and angles were ten battlemented towers, each of which was an impregnable bastion. On the turrets and walls were stationed guns among which was a cannon firing with two hundred pound balls. In the fortress walls were chutes through which the defenders poured boiling pitch down on the assailants. The pitch was boiled in a huge cauldron made to hold a hundred buckets.

The number of the monastery's defenders was pitifully small, amounting to scarcely three thousand men. But they held on manfully through the long wearing siege with its frenzied stormings and saps laid under its walls. Suffering as they were from hunger the men not only defended their sacred walls but made daring sallies, inflicting blows on the enemy. The monastery held out. After an uneffective siege which had lasted sixteen months the enemy ignominiously retreated.

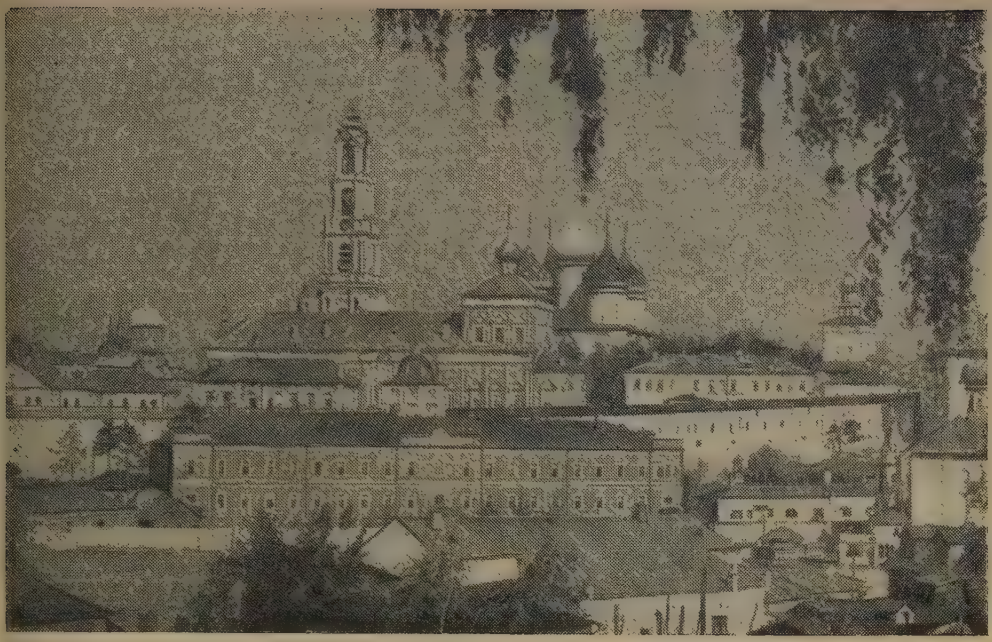
In August, 1689, a foam-flecked steed bearing a youthful rider on its back came galloping through the monastery gates. It was the young tsar, Peter I. Having been warned of a conspiracy brewing against him he had rushed off to seek protection within the precincts of the monastery. It was not long before the troops that had remained faithful to the tsar came riding up along the Troitsk road. The rebellion was put down.

But it was not only by such warlike deeds as these that the Troitsk-Sergievsk Monastery gained fame. It was one of the main seats of ancient Russian culture. Books were written here and icons painted by masters whose work has called forth the delighted admiration of many generations. The numerous buildings of the monastery are unique monuments of Russian architecture. The churches, walls, chambers and towers of the monastery are recorded on the canvases of Constantine Korovin, Pyotr Konchalovsky, Constantine Yuon.

The severe tests of centuries have left heavy traces on the venerable pile. The edifices were gradually beginning to crumble. Before the outbreak of the war experts were summoned—historians, archeologists, architects, painters and engineers, and a plan for capital restoration work was drafted.

The war put an end to these activities. Now they have been resumed once more, and the architectural ensemble of the Troitsk-Sergievsk Monastery will be restored in all its original loveliness.

One of the most ancient of the monastery's stone buildings—the Troitsk Cathedral, was erected in the year 1422. The interior walls were decorated in the 15th century by the famous Russian artist, Andrei Rublev, the most skilled of the icon painters in old Russia. The five-domed Cathedral of the Assumption bears a strong resemblance to the Cathe-



Troitsk-Sergievsk Monastery. Seen from the south

dral of the same name in the Moscow Kremlin. Its walls are covered with frescos from the brushes of Yaroslavl painters. The refectory with its splendid porches ornamented with carved columns entwined with stone garlands is a brilliant monument of the "Moscow Barocco". The five-storied stone belfry represents the epoch of the "late barocco", its light forms creating an impression of impulsive, soaring movement.

All the architectural history of ancient Russian building from the white-stone structures of the Vladimir-Suzdal epoch (15th century), to the airy belfries created by Rastrelli in the 18th century passes before one's eyes.

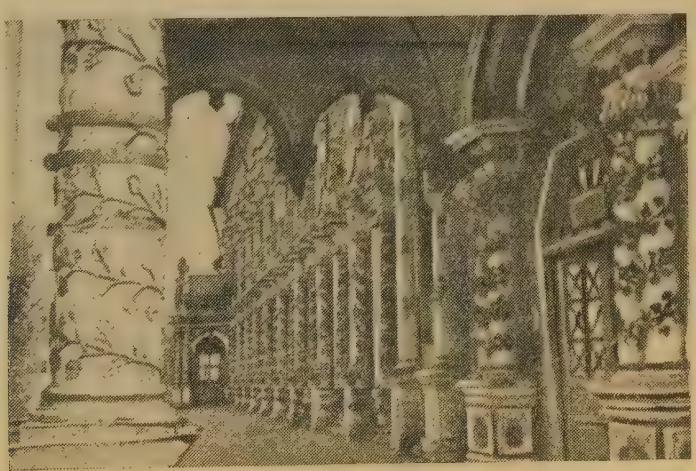
THE YOUNG GUARD MUSEUM

The activities of the underground youth organization at Krasnodon during the Hitler occupation were a great example of selfless devotion to country and the people. The deeds of Krasnodon youth inspired Alexander Fadeyev to write his *Young Guard*[1], a novel in whose pages the images of Oleg Koshevoy, Uliana Gromova, Ivan Zemnukhov and their noble comrades live again before our eyes.

There is a museum at Krasnodon where the memory of the young heroes is kept green to all time; its four rooms contain some 150 pictures, photos, documents and other material telling how they worked and how they died.

The first room depicts their lives before the coming of the Germans. The next shows everything that bears on the period of the fascist occupation, A large picture hung in

[1] See *International Literature* No. 7, 1945 and *Soviet Literature* Nos. 1, 3, 4-5, 1946.



ejectory portal of Troitsk-ergievsk Monastery

Room III shows a meeting at the "Young Guard" Headquarters.

One cannot view unmoved the personal belongings of these marvellous young people; the simple pliers they used to cut German wires; the hand grenades the girl Valia Borts carried about her own person; the daggers they made with their own hands—and the things that were handed to their friends by the prison authorities after their death, a bloodstained handkerchief belonging to Ivan Zemnukhov and a small kettle he had carried in his kit bag.

AN INTERESTING COLLECTION

Over half a century ago the Russian operatic stage rang with the fame of the singer, Nikolai Figner. He was the first to sing the part of Hermann in Chaikovsky's opera, *Queen of Spades*, a role he studied under the guidance of the author himself. Figner knew no rivals as Lensky in *Eugene Onegin*.

How did his voice sound? What was his manner of singing?—in a word—how did Figner sing?

The answer is given by an old gramophone record. It is all worn down; the grooves are hardly visible, but it gives you an idea of the singer's mastery, and of his wonderful voice.

The Figner record is one of the treasures of an interesting collection belonging to a Soviet singer—Ivan Nazarenko, a soloist of the Bolshoi Theatre. Four thousand records with six thousand names form the sum total of this collection accummulated by an enthusiast. Among them are rare records of Chaliapin, Leonid Sobinov, Antonina Nezhdanova and some of the Italian singers. Nor is it only music, instrumental and vocal, that we hear reproduced by these records. . . A slow, calm voice, the voice of an old man, is reading an excerpt from a book. We read the inscription: Leo Tolstoy, *Thoughts from "For Every Day", read by the Author*. Another record is a monologue from *Maria Stuart* recited by the Russian tragic actress, Maria Ermolova.

THE MOSCOW HOUSE OF SCIENTISTS

The year 1947 will witness the twenty-fifth birthday of the Moscow House of Scientists. The idea of a club uniting workers in all and every department of science originally belonged to Maxim Gorky. The idea was approved by Lenin, and in 1922, a hard year of general disorganization, the government raised the necessary funds for the founding of a House of Scientists. And now during a quarter of a century of activities the organization has grown into one of the most important seats of culture and learning in the country.

Membership is open to any scientist or research worker holding a degree of Master of Science and higher. The body now numbers three thousand members representing different branches of learning. At the meetings and scientific conferences held at the House of Scientists you will see members of the medical profession, biologists, mathematicians, agronomists, physicists, and educationalists assembled to discuss new scientific problems and compare notes in their respective branches of knowledge.

The members of the club are organized into sections according to the nature of their respective specialities. These sections sponsor regular meetings between scientists, workers and engineers of the capital as well as popular lectures and talks on a variety of topics. Questions of agricultural science, new makes of tractors, teaching methods and lectures for the youth on the choice of a profession cater to a wide range of interests and attract Moscovites in their hundreds to the halls of the House of Scientists. The House is popular not only among scholars, but also among all sections of the population.

Zhora Arutyunyants' room in the Young Guard Museum in Krasnodon

It is a place not only for work, but also for rest and relaxation for its members. A mere listing of the circles drawing into their membership younger scholars as well as grey-haired academicians, would speak for itself. Music and art circles, photography, chess, billiards, sporting circles. Tennis and hunting are popular, so is sailing. There is an excellent laboratory at the service of amateur photographers. The chess players among the learned members have opportunities of competing with the chess masters of the Soviet Union. Cinema fans have a well appointed studio at their disposal. The excellent library contains forty-five thousand

volumes, and there is a goodly selection of Soviet and foreign periodicals in the spacious reading rooms.

The Large Hall of the club seats seven hundred people. Well-known writers, theatrical people and musicians are frequent visitors, and exhibitions of pictures by Soviet painters are a recurring feature. Members of the House themselves figure in musical and dramatic performances. A choir consisting of members of the House of Scientists is always a success.

There is a club attached for the children of members, boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 15, that has circles of its own—sporting, carpentry, drawing, modelling and others, as well as a library and lecture room.

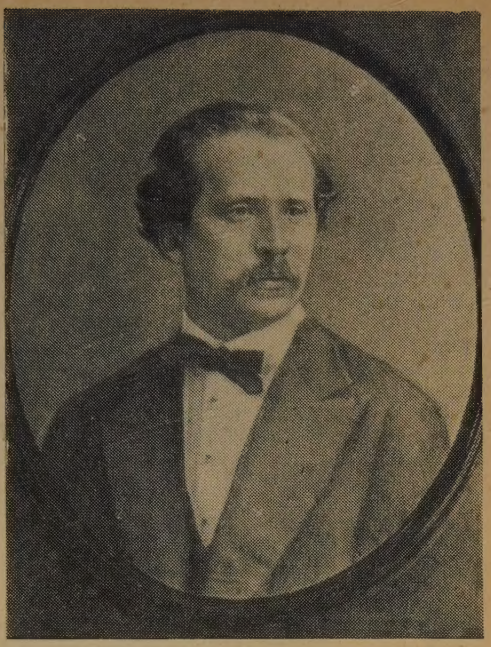
The work of the House of Scientists is controlled by a council elected from among its membership, and is headed by a director. For many years now this post has been held by Maria Andreyeva, widow of the writer, Maxim Gorky. The Orders of Lenin and the Red Banner testify to the appreciation she has earned by her fruitful labours.

The entire activities of the House, she said, are directed to helping men of learning in their work of solving important problems raised by the steady forward march of progressive science and technical thought.

MOSCOW CONSERVATORY CELEBRATES 80th ANNIVERSARY

Eighty years ago, on September the first (old style), 1866, a group of musicians assembled in an old-fashioned two-storied building in the Russian Empire style to establish the Moscow Conservatory. The arrivals were met by a man with bright, lively eyes and hair carelessly pushed back from his forehead. He was Nikolai Rubinstein, famous pianist and conductor, prominent teacher and protagonist of the young Russian music. The Conservatory was in very truth part of his flesh and blood; he was a man, whose life was entirely merged in the life of musical art.

After the usual exchange of compliments fitting to such an occasion, a young man, the youngest of the professors present, took his seat at the piano. Moscow people did not know much about him but it was said that Rubinstein had invited him from St. Petersburg where he had recently graduated from the Conservatory. The young man's modest dress spoke of his humble circumstances. It was rumoured that he had come to Moscow in an old racoon coat lent him by the poet Alexei Apukhtin. The new professor played the overture to Glinka's opera *Ruslan and Ludmila*; it was a marvellous performance. He was Pyotr Chaikovsky, who was to be another great figure to work energetically for the growth and progress of the Conservatory. For the next eleven years Chaikovsky conducted classes in the theory of music and wrote the first Russian manual of Harmony. Even when he had attained to the heights of fame, Chaikovsky never lost touch with the school nor ceased to take the closest interest in its needs and doings. It was the students of the Moscow Conservatory who were the first to perform his opera *Eugene Onegin*. He was delighted with the enthusiasm with which the young people received his opera. "It is indeed a piece of good fortune for my *Onegin*," he wrote. "Of course it will be fledglings who will sing, but on the other hand there will be no routine!" The historical performance which proved the foundation to the world fame of *Eugene Onegin*, took place on March 17th, 1879.



Nikolai Rubinstein, founder and first director of the Moscow Conservatory

The history of the Moscow Conservatory is closely bound with the names of three eminent Russian musicians who were at different times its directors, Sergei Taneyev, Vassili Safonov and Mikhail Ippolitov-Ivanov.

The Conservatory is housed to the present day in a building that was erected in the nineties of last century. The sounds of every imaginable instrument ring out in these corridors. The students in bygone years used to meet Chaikovsky; here, too, on the conductor's dais rose the energetic figure of Vassili Safonov; in the classrooms the future composers Sergei Lyapunov, Alexander Kastalsky, Alexander Grechaninov and Nikolai Metner attended their music lessons as boys: here the youth Rachmaninov brought the manuscript of his first opera, *Aleko*; in this hall Scriabin listened to the first performance of his works; here Constantine Igumnov and Alexander Goldenweiser, now venerable professors, appeared at the piano at student's concerts.

Architecture has been called "frozen music". If the comparison be accepted, the Large Hall of the Conservatory can be likened to an oratorio in the majestic simplicity of its conception. The Conservatory prides itself on the acoustics of a hall built to seat over two thousand people. It is said that with absolute quiet you can, seated in the top gallery, hear a match being struck on the platform!

The silver pipes of the organ glitter in the

depths of the hall. Portraits of the great musicians of the world in oval, gold-framed medallions, look down from the walls.

Many generations have been educated at the Conservatory. The names of the most outstanding musicians are carved on marble slabs which are hanging in the foyer. This list—the golden record of the Conservatory—is headed by Sergei Taneyev who was graduated in 1875. In the class of 1928 we see the name of Vissaryon Shebalin, its present Director.

During the war years many of the Conservatory's alumni went to the defense of their country. Pavel Apostolov left for the front, a student, returned Colonel of the Guards with a row of medals. He did not forget his music though, and soon after he came back he read a brilliant thesis on the history of military music in Russia. Another student from the Conservatory, Leonid Zhivov, passed his Fifth Course examinations in the June days of 1941, and volunteered straight away into the Red Army. After a long fighting experience he is working again in the class of Docent Emmanuel Grossman, and has been awarded a Stalin Scholarship.

The Conservatory front-line concerts were a prominent feature during the war: some four and a half thousand in all were given for the army and navy, two thousand of which were held in the front lines.

Today the Conservatory consists of an institute of higher education comprising five faculties, a school of music, a Central Children's Musical School and an opera studio. The two thousand persons enrolled range from the seven-year-old youngsters in the lowest class of the children's school to the graduate ready to receive his diploma.

The opera Eugene Onegin *staged for the first time by students of the Moscow Conservatory (1878)*

Editor-in-chief: ALEXANDER KARAGANOV

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